

DIVINATION IN THE NIGER DELTA  
WITH REFERENCE TO EPIE-ATISSA COMMUNITY

by

Sunday Alawei Fefegha  
School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London

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**ABSTRACT OF THESIS**  
**DIVINATION IN THE NIGER DELTA**  
**WITH REFERENCE TO EPIE-ATISSA COMMUNITY**

This thesis focuses on various aspects of divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa, in the Central Niger Delta of Nigeria, which fall into two main categories, namely: the communal and individual or private types of divination. There are two main instruments for communal divination - the aganaga, 'ladder' divination and its variation, the ugbolo, 'staff' divination. The first is restricted specifically for post-mortem divination, which determines how the dead is buried, that is, if he or she died practising 'witchcraft', ida or not. This is ascertained through Utoken, 'the Earth goddess', to the 'ancestors', inibudu.

The second, ugbolo divination is used in connection with other crisis related catastrophes, such as sickness, etc., except death. Both are restricted to communal 'shrines', ugula under the idiomu, operated by men only. The third are the individual or private types of divination which are open to both men and women diviners who make use of various instruments, under an elaborate, ritualistic system.

When examined in the light of some of the prevailing theories on the phenomenology of divination in Africa, it was discovered that divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa fall within the categories of possession and intuitive types, with characteristics appertaining to them. Lacking, however, is wisdom divination which is practised among the Yoruba, notable of which is the Ifa divination, and also among the Ibo. An attempt has therefore been made to explain why this is lacking in Epie-Atissa.

This thesis therefore assembles some of the most important types of divination in Epie-Atissa, describes, analyses and examines them in the light of various prevailing theories about divinatory practices. It is in several ways a typological study of divination which highlights the praxis, functions and characteristics of these various types of divination. It explains why people become diviners, the various clientele, the reasons for going to the diviners, and the economic importance of this occupation in Epie-Atissa.



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**PLATE 62**

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**PLATE 63**

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Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba, holds a 'staff of office', ugbolo, with his right hand, and azuzu, 'fan' with the left. These constitute aspects of his cultic regalia.

**PLATE 64**

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**PLATE 65**

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Mrs. Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi divination at Kpansia holding her 'fan', azuzu as an indication of her priestly rank.

**PLATE 66**

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Mrs. Janet Adibagha and Mina Igbomu do not hold 'fans', azuzu, probably because they are still too junior in rank to do so.

**PLATE 67**

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Cultic members of Aruku-eken at Famgbe ready for okumo ceremony, led by Mr. Lot. Note that his right hand is raised as he makes the invocation called lala-ogbo.

**PLATE 68**

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Devotees of Orisa at Akaba blowing the 'horn', egbelegbele of Aruku-egene to see the effect.

**PLATE 69**

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Picture showing the 'bells', igbeme in the shrine of Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi divination.

**PLATE 70**

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Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba is possessed following the blowing of the cultic 'horn', egbelegbele. Note the way the hands are spread then lifted up.

**PLATE 71**

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Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba possessed after blowing the cultic horn. Note the change in his eyes and the effect on other devotees.

**PLATE 72**

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The picture shows a teenage girl from the village of Ikolo just circumcised. Note the emphasis placed on 'camwood dye', atun, used all over her body, and the red beads on the neck and waist, indicative of life and fertility.

**PLATE 73**

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By contrast, the big, 'red coral beads', ila yereyere, on the neck of this woman is indicative of death. It shows that she is the chief mourner and the closest person to the departed soul, probably her mother, she comes from the village of Swali.

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This thesis is the product of my independent, original field work performed in the Niger Delta from December 1984 through June 1986, a period of about 18 months, during which the encouragements of Professor E.J. Alagoa and Professor Robin Horton, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, are greatly appreciated. A selected list of Scholars whose work influenced my thinking is included in the Bibliography.

Sunday Alawei Fefegha

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

<u>HJSR</u>	-	<u>Humbolt Journal of Social Relations</u>
<u>JAH</u>	-	<u>Journal of African History</u>
<u>JAF</u>	-	<u>Journal of American Folklore</u>
<u>JAR</u>	-	<u>Journal of Anthropological Research</u>
<u>JAS</u>	-	<u>Journal of African Society</u>
<u>JRAI</u>	-	<u>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</u>
<u>JRA</u>	-	<u>Journal of Religion in Africa</u>
<u>JRS</u>	-	<u>Journal of Religious Studies</u>
<u>JIA</u>	-	<u>Journal of International Affairs</u>
<u>JFI</u>	-	<u>Journal of Folklore Institute</u>
<u>JEP</u>	-	<u>Journal of Experimental Psychology</u>
<u>SWJA</u>	-	<u>South West Journal of Anthropology</u>

## INTRODUCTION

### Reasons for the Study

Divination is practised in most parts of the Niger Delta, but the extent to which it is practised in Epie-Atissa, an important cultural and commercial centre in the Central Niger has never been explored.

Scholars have examined divination and sacrifice in the areas adjacent to Epie-Atissa. These include Robin Horton who has been working in Kalabari;<sup>1</sup> E.J. Alagoa wrote something about divination in connection with the Apoi, who are of the Kolokuma Ijo of the Central Niger Delta extraction, but now live among the Yoruba in Okitipupa division, Ondo State, Western Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> Others like Nabofa, Elugbe and Eriwo have concentrated their efforts in the Urhobo area, being their place of origin.<sup>3</sup> Similarly Francis Arinze and A. Shelton have worked on sacrifice and divination, respectively, in the Ibo area.<sup>4</sup> These areas are situated to the North, East and West of the designated area which has been neglected. Thus a gap or more specifically, a hiatus has been left at the centre which this work seeks to fill, in order to begin to provide a more complete picture of practice of divination in the Niger Delta as a whole.

The thesis firstly investigates and describes some of the prevalent types of divination practised in the Epie-Atissa, together with their various characteristics, importance and associated symbols and their meanings. Secondly, it seeks to establish the reasons why people become diviners, and why people go to them. Finally, it examines how divination in this area

relates to some of the general and prevailing theories about the functions and the phenomenology of divination in Africa.

### Epie-Atissa clans and Cultural Identity

The Epie-Atissa "clans"\* consist of 29 villages of which 17 villages make up the Epie section, and the Atissa section comprises 12 villages. The two clans have a total population of about 100,000, spread over an area of about 54 square miles. This gives a density of about 1852 persons per square mile. (See maps of the designated area in the pocket in the rear of the thesis).

The most important cultural fact that brings these two clans together is the common language they speak, called Epie language. This has been "classed as Delta Edo"<sup>5</sup> because it is identified with the language spoken by their Engenni speaking neighbours from which 11 villages in Epie and 6 villages in Atissa, migrated to their present locations. Engenni is therefore regarded historically as 'parent' of Epie-Atissa.<sup>6</sup> By Edo, the reference is to the language spoken in Benin area which would imply that it is not only a "sub-branch of the Edo language of Benin",<sup>7</sup> but also that Benin was probably the original home of the people in Epie-Atissa community.<sup>8</sup>

\*The word "clan" was originally applied by the British administration to many village groups in Southern Nigeria; it was used for groups that had some sort of political solidarity, but it does not imply that the people claim descent from a common ancestor.



But it is important to note that in spite of some slight variations in accent in the two clans, Epie language is unique and distinct to the people because while a majority of them can speak Nembe, Kolokuma, Kalabari and Engenni languages, being their neighbours, these neighbours are unable to speak Epie language. The two clans are therefore identical linguistically thus making them unique within the Ijo block among whom they live. They also have common occupational patterns, and similar rituals and ceremonial dances, fashions of dress and life style in general.

#### Local Political Organization:

Each village in Epie-Atissa is governed locally by the 'village head', obeneken, meaning 'owner of the village or town'. This is a compound word in which obene, as spoken in the Epie section, or ebene, in the Atissa section, means 'owner', and eken, means 'village, town or settlement'. They do not inherit this title, but they are chosen by the entire village on the basis of age, experience, intelligence, capability and integrity. The obeneken's council members consist of 'family heads', ebeni-ipele, who are also elected within each 'family or compound', ipele, all of whom make use of the chieftaincy title of 'chief' after their installation ceremonies. These together with the obeneken, 'village head' ensure that the 'laws', oloko, with reference to the 'customs and traditions of the land', ikpese-utoken, are maintained. They discuss civil matters and settle minor, domestic disputes among the people. They therefore constitute the Village Council, known as igbani-kpiri-igbeni, meaning 'those

who settle disputes', or the local judicial system. It is believed that 'laws', oloko were determined by the 'ancestors', inibudu, and that any breach of these laws may incur misfortune caused by the anger of the dead.

In order to keep the clan together, a 'clan head', ebeni-ibe, meaning 'owner of the clan', is appointed by the 'village heads', obeneken, in consultation with their subjects. He holds regular meetings with the obeneken, and superintends over the welfare of the clan. Thus there are two 'clan heads', Ebeni-Ibe in Epie-Atissa. For example, Chief B.L.W. Mabinton is the Ebeni-Ibe of Atissa, with his residence at Yenagoa (see *below*, pp.236-238); Chief C.B. Agulata is the Obeni-Ibe of Epie clan, with his residence at Amarata. One of them is elected for life to represent the two clans in the Rivers State Council of Chiefs, in Port Harcourt, the administrative headquarters and capital city of Rivers State. His stool is then recognized by both the Government and the Rivers State Traditional Rulers Council, for which he receives certain privileges. The various ways in which these traditional rulers work with the diviners in order to preserve the tradition and culture of the people will be dealt with accordingly in this thesis.

### Christianity and Education

The Anglican Church came to Epie-Atissa about 1911, following which churches were planted in several of the villages by the Niger Delta Pastorate which operated initially from Bonny and Nembe, but later became a parish with resident priests stationed

at Yenagoa. The Roman Catholic Mission were able subsequently to establish themselves in only two villages, namely Amarata and Famgbe. But now most of these churches have been closed down, giving way again to practices divination.

Mission schools were established in the area about the early 1930s mostly at the primary school levels. The first missionary secondary school was established at Yenagoa in the early 1960s, sponsored by the Anglican Church. Thus, like Christianity, educational institutions and related facilities also came late to the area, and people are yet to experience the full impact of these institutions in the area. The extent to which divination and related practices have affected the area as a major counter productive force is also one of the subjects studied in this thesis.

Noteworthy is the fact that people in Epie-Atissa area did not have early contact with the West till very late. They are not usually adventurous so very few of them have actually travelled to foreign lands. In other words, they are mostly homekeeping people who therefore hold to very conservative ideas. There is no close genealogical relationship between most of the villages so there is no specific organization that holds the group together. Things are therefore done mostly according to the mores of the village under the direction of the Obeneken, 'village head', in consultation with the chief priest of Utoken, 'the Earth goddess'.

### OCCUPATIONS:

The people in Epie-Atissa are engaged in various occupations. Firstly, as <sup>with</sup> people who live in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta, fishing is the predominant occupation. As a result, they supply fish in commercial quantities to many parts of Nigeria. Secondly, they also engage in subsistence farming on whatever arable land <sup>is</sup> available. If, however, the rains are too severe, floods submerge the farms and the crops; Epie-Atissa has been noted as part of the belt which supplies most of Nigeria with such crops as plantains, bananas, sugar canes, palm oil and kernels, pepper. They also produce yams, but not in commercial quantity, as are produced by the Ibos and people from Ogoja to the North who plant on better soil. Thirdly, they also engage in petty-trading. This is because the principal town, Yenagoa, which is both the administrative headquarters of the two clans, and of the Yenagoa Local Government Area (YELGA), in general, is linked to the rest of the country by a good motorable road. It has several modern amenities, such as, electricity, hospital, police, the judiciary, schools, administrative offices, a modern market, etc. As a result, Yenagoa is also a central commercial town, so well located that people from various parts of Nigeria converge there by land and also by river,

in order to buy and sell.

Nevertheless, since most of the towns and villages in this community are situated along the deltaic parts of the River Niger, they are generally influenced by a cosmology in which 'water divinities', known in Epie-Atissa language as idiomu-amini, and also known generally among the people as 'mammy-water' or 'mermaid', in contrast to 'land divinities', idiomu-okunu play prominent parts. One reason for this is that people are generally very conscious of fertility. They desire to have a number of good things, namely, plenty of children, long life and prosperity. As fishermen and farmers, they want good harvests of fish and crops; and as petty-traders, they want quick turn-overs, and great financial gains. Instead of depending on hard work alone to achieve these goals, or in addition to it, they also worship 'deities', known in Epie-Atissa as idiomu, in order to aid them in these directions.

Corresponding to this is the strong belief in the area of 'witch-craft', known as ida. This is very much dreaded because of the destructive element involved. Therefore those who think their lives and properties are threatened, quickly run to the 'shrines', ugula of some of these deities in order to protect themselves, their wives and children, and their properties. As will be seen especially in Chapter 4, people visit some of these 'shrines', ugula, for all sorts of reasons, and spend large sums of money annually in some of these places. Therefore some of the most popular

centres like Orisa at Akaba attract<sup>^</sup> numerous clientele (see below, Chapter 4, pp.225ff). This is partly because Orisa is regarded as the principal deity of fecundity in the area. It therefore attracts especially women who are barren, so that they may solicit for children. In this community therefore, nothing bad happens without an explanation. Misfortunes such as sickness, death, barrenness and miscarriages among women, poor harvests and impotence among men, are always attributed to malevolent forces, like 'witchcraft', ida, and related 'evil spirits', osio-didieli. The reasons for these misfortunes are therefore ascertained by a method known to the people as isini pulem, meaning, 'an inquiry'.

#### CONCEPT OF ISINI-PULEM:

The word, isini-pulem is etymologically a compound word in which, isini means, 'something', and pulem means 'that which is enquired about', or 'sought for'. It portrays a situation where the individual concerned, having failed to receive any satisfactory explanation through modern medicine, for example, in connection with an ailment or problem, travels from one village to the other and never rests until a fairly satisfactory explanation has been offered. For this reason, isini-pulem in Epie-Atissa could be translated as 'divination', which has been defined in a variety of ways. For instance, Evans-Pritchard defined it as "a method of discovering what is unknown and often cannot

be known by experiment and logic".<sup>9</sup> While it is possible to detect the application of various types of logic, such as deductive and inductive logic, including epistemological discussions in certain aspects of Epie-Atissa divination system, the diviners and even their clientele are not interested in the testing of hypotheses and in logic, as such. This is because the clientele want their problems solved by all possible means, and the diviners depend on their esoteric knowledge for the solutions, not on Western scientific methods.

In Epie-Atissa and in several parts of the Niger Delta, therefore, the concept of isini-pulem or 'divination' covers almost every kind of problem, such that it covers the past, present and future. This is because the diviner is expected to be able "to communicate with the unseen and supersensible world, and transmit messages from ancestors, spirits, and divinities to his clients."<sup>10</sup> Thus divination is not just "the prediction of the future events and the interpretation of the past occurrences"<sup>11</sup> only, but it must also deal with present problems. Thus one main aspect in this connection is in the area of sickness. There have been cases where while the sick person is in bed in the hospital under medical care, and while all the necessary scientific tests are being performed, some family members are sent to make enquiries through traditional methods about the cause or causes of that sickness (see Chapter 2, pp.94ff). The person to whom they go for such purposes is called onyobu. Again, this is a compound word, onyo-obu, in which onyo

means, 'man' in the generic sense; and obu is 'to heal'. Thus onyobu means, 'someone who heals' or 'cures'. In almost all cases in Epie-Atissa, any one known and called onyobu, is also <sup>the</sup> priest of a particular 'deity', idiomu; and the person may be male or female. Furthermore, 'deity', idiomu could either be personal and private, or communal. In whatever case, those who are known as 'priests', onyobu are those who have been fully initiated following a definite call by the idiomu concerned (see Chapter 6). It is after this initiation that the 'deity', idiomu bestows onyobu with certain esoteric abilities, such as the use of herbs. Hence the word onyobu refers to both the 'herbalist' as well as the 'medium', and 'priest' of 'divinity', idiomu. This is equivalent to Ifa priests in Yorubaland who are called babalawo, a word which means, "father has secrets".<sup>12</sup> That is why they perform the primary function of divining, as a necessary service to the people.<sup>13</sup> The Epie-Atissa concept of onyobu is also similar to the concept of dibia, 'medicine man'. The difference however is that, according to the Ibo, the dibia may be "gifted in the knowledge of the use of herbs to cure various diseases",<sup>14</sup> but he is not regarded as a priest who may perform divination. He may only do so through the diviner priests, who may be "heads of households, lineages and clans."<sup>15</sup> As a result, these diviner-priests function in some of the principal shrines or oracles in Iboland, such as, "The Chukwu oracle Ubinukpabi of Arochukwu popularly known as the long juju; the Agbala of Awka, the Igwe-Ka-Ala of Umunoha near Owerri, and the Onyili Ora near Agu-Ukwu, Nri".<sup>16</sup> But in Epie-Atissa,



anyone known and called Onyobu performs three main functions: namely, he divines, cures and offers sacrifices. As will be seen later, some, mostly male priests, are assigned to the services of the communal deities, while others, mostly women, perform privately as mediums of their individual 'deities', idiomu (see at Chapters 2, 3 and 6). Thus, while isini-pulem translates for the art of 'divination', onyobu refers to the cultic-adept who performs the roles of diviner, who must divine as a means of diagnosing and ascertaining the cause or causes of the problem. A cure is then prescribed and performed, and relevant sacrifices offered for the purpose of appeasement, wherever necessary.

One very important aspect of <sup>the</sup> Epie-Atissa belief system is in connection with the worship of 'ancestors', known to them as inibudu. The 'deity', idiomu, through whom all communications with the 'ancestors' inibudu are addressed is called Utoken, meaning 'land of the village', which is indeed 'the earth goddess'. Again the word Utoken is a compound word, which is actually, Uto - eken, in which uto means 'land', and eken, means 'town', 'village', or any such 'settlements'. How Utoken becomes a deity, which is venerated and worshipped, together with her functions and taboos, are discussed below. (See at Chapter 5, pp.304-317, for details). Suffice it here to say that the traditions and customs of the individual villages in Epie-Atissa, and the people's philosophical thought and religious ideas in general, are upheld and centred around the concept of

Utoken. It is equivalent to what the Ibos call, Omenani, 'the earth goddess', around which the entire Ibo tradition depends.<sup>17</sup> It is for this reason that most of the priests in Epie-Atissa in the service of Utoken, which is the most important community deity in the area, are regarded as the religious specialists who direct and lead members of the society in their ritual activities. In this respect, it is worth noting that Christianity, education and the need for modernization have also affected Epie-Atissa. But realizing that Christianity, mainly the Anglican Church, arrived in this area only about 1912 (see at Chapter 1, p.39 and footnote 8), and that the area is yet to experience any particular wave of charismatic renewal, it would be proper to indicate that belief in the 'ancestors', inibudu, utoken, 'land goddess', and the customs and traditions built around these, seem to predominate.

Therefore, in order not to offend the 'ancestors', inibudu, it is a 'taboo', agugulu to bury the dead without first performing a post-mortem divination. This is done first in secret at the 'shrine', ugula of Utoken, by the chief priest, his cultic personnel, and the relatives of the deceased in order to ascertain how he or she died. If the person died practising 'witchcraft', ida, then it is a 'bad death', uwu-didieli. Here the word uwu, means 'death', and didieli, could be shortened to, dieli, which still means, 'bad', or odieli, 'that which is bad' or 'it is bad'. If the person did not die practising witchcraft, ida, then he or she 'died well', uwu-vie. Whenever something is good or

beautiful, the word ovie is used in Epie language to describe everything that is 'good'. But whenever it is used as a compound word, ovie is generally abbreviated to vie, as in the case of odieli and dieli. These two concepts of 'good', ovie, and 'bad', odieli, seem therefore to be the central focus around which the religious practices in Epie-Atissa, and especially the divinatory practices are built.

After the first, private post-mortem divination in the ugula of Utoken, a second post-mortem divination is then repeated in a public seance in the presence of the whole community in order to establish the details. If the person 'died well', ovie, he is then buried in 'the good-bush', azi-ovie; but if it was 'bad death', odieli, he is buried in the 'bad-bush', azi-odieli. Perhaps this may be regarded to some extent, as the Epie-Atissa concept of heaven and hell. The 'bad-bush' is the hell to which all those who died practising witchcraft are sent for perpetual torment; a judgment which is decided by the community here and now. But the 'good-bush' is the heaven reserved only for those who 'died-well'. This would mean therefore, that a 'sinner', onyu-wulu-odieli, that is, 'some one who practises evil', or delights in 'making', wulu, 'evil', odieli, is the man or woman who practices witchcraft. Otherwise, the person is 'righteous', onyo-wulu-ovie, that is, 'one who 'makes' wulu good.

### Purposes of Divination

The system of divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa is elaborate. Some are connected with death, and others are connected with crisis related calamities. A variety of cultic instruments have also been devised for these purposes. It is therefore the purpose of this thesis to identify and investigate some of the most important divinatory centres in Epie-Atissa, and to present a careful descriptive analysis of the various types of divinatory practices in the area. The thesis also seeks to establish some of the basic functions of divination in Epie-Atissa, and how they relate to some of the theories on 'the Phenomenology of Divination in Africa', presented by scholars like M. Zuesse<sup>18</sup> and Renaat Devisch,<sup>19</sup> who have sought to give the classification, functions and characteristics of divination.

### METHOD:

The subjects or group of people for this study consist primarily of priests and priestesses with particular reference to the various 'deities', idiomu they represent. Some members of the cultic personnel, elderly people, traditional rulers and some of the clientele who could give useful information in connection with their experiences, were interviewed. Thus, the data for this study were obtained by using two main instruments, namely, interviews

and direct observation or fieldwork by participant observation. The intention was to have a holistic approach to the cultural and traditional phenomenology of divination in Epie-Atissa. Hence, although the interviews were helpful, even more helpful was the field work by participant-observation which gave this writer the opportunity to be culturally oriented to some of the most important cultic-adepts in the area, who also allowed him to have a first hand experience of their practices. This enabled him to have face-to-face relationships with the people, "so that the data collected in some sense reflect the native's own point of view".<sup>20</sup>

The interviews were used as avenues of building bridges of friendship between the subjects and the researcher, so that the necessary confidence could be created. This, and the fact that the researcher is a son of the soil, made it relatively easy for them to allow him into some of their various 'shrines', ugula, so as to directly observe and record relevant proceedings of divinatory seances, ceremonies, related rituals, signs and symbols. With their permission, relevant information was tape-recorded in its original form in the vernacular in which all interviews were conducted. This was later translated into English and written out. Photographs were also taken, wherever and whenever necessary, in order to authenticate the information given. Again, these were taken after permission had been granted, and they constitute sources of primary information.

One of the most important sources of primary information was the register of the Orisa at Akaba maintained by the Cultic Secretary from 9th February, 1983, till 7th February, 1986. This register gave a great deal of information in connection with the different types of clients who visited this shrine for divinatory purposes, during the period indicated, in terms of name, address, occupation, reasons for consultation, the fees paid, and relevant prescriptions. This helped to determine the economic importance of divination as a lucrative venture. It also provided much information on the different functions served by divination.

#### Emic Perspective:

This writer adopts the emic perspective in the presentation of this thesis. Stress is therefore laid on the subjective meanings shared by people in Epie-Atissa on the practice of divination, thus pin pointing their culturally specific model of experience.

### Footnotes

1. cf. Robin Horton, 'Ikpatata-Dogi: A Kalabari Funeral Rite', African Notes (1970), pp.55-71; 'Kalabari World-View: An Outline and Interpretation', Africa, 32, 3 (1962), pp.197-218; 'African Conversion', Africa (1971), pp.101-107; 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', Africa (1967), pp.155-161.
2. E.J. Alagoa, 'The Western Apoi: Notes on the Use of Ethnographic Data in Historical Reconstruction', African Notes, 5, 1, (1968), pp.12-24.
3. M.Y. Nabofa and B.O. Elugbe, 'Epha, an Urhobo System of Divination and its Esoteric Language', Orita, 13, 1 (1981), pp.3-19; Sam Eriwo, 'Epha: Divination System Among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta', African Notes, 8, 1, (1979), pp.21-25.
4. Francis Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970) and A. Shelton, 'The Meaning and Method of Afa Divination among the Northern Nsukka Ibo', American Anthropologist, (1965), pp.1441-1455.
5. See E.J. Alagoa, A History of the Niger Delta, An Historical Interpretation of the Ijo Oral Tradition (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972), p.178.
6. Idem.
7. E.J. Alagoa, p.110.
8. Ibid., p.177.
9. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.228.
10. Sam Eriwo, 'Epha, Divination System among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta', op. cit., p.21.
11. Edwin Yamauchi, The World of the First Christians (Tring, Herts: Lion Publishing, 1981), p.124.
12. William Bascom, Ifa Divination, Communication between God and Men in West Africa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p.81.
13. Wande Abimbola, Ifa, An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.17.
14. Edmund Ilogu, Christianity and the Ibo Culture (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p.53.
15. Idem.
16. Idem.

17. Edmund Ilogu, Ibid., pp.22-24.
18. Evan M. Zuesse, 'Divination and Deity in African Religions', History of Religions, 15 (1975), pp.158 -182.
19. Renaat Devisch, 'Perspectives on Divination in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa', in Wim M.J. Van Binsbergen and Matthew Schoffeleers, Theoretical Explorations in African Religion (London: 1985), pp.50-78.
20. George W. Stocking (ed.), History of Anthropology Observers Observed, Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork (London: The University of Wisconsin Press Ltd., 1983), p.7. Also see Charlotte Seymour-Smith, Dictionary of Anthropology (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986), p.245, on the importance of participant observation in data collecting by Malinowski.



## CHAPTER 1

### DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNAL TYPE OF DIVINATORY PRACTICE IN EPIE-ATISSA

There are various types of divination practised in Epie-Atissa. Broadly speaking, they fall into two main categories, namely, communal and individual types of divination. That is, there are specific occasions in which diviners act either as representatives of the community or as individuals. The principal occasion when diviners act as representatives of the community is in connection with death, for the community is entitled according to tradition to know why the person died and especially whether or not the person died practising witchcraft. If he did, then they are entitled to know the extent of damage done in the community, and such knowledge also determines the type of burial he receives. Otherwise, it is believed that the 'ancestors', inibudu, could be provoked to anger and thus cause other calamities among the people. What would be regarded as post-mortem divination is therefore performed with the view of preserving the members of the community from the wrath of the ancestors because of any carelessness that may arise in the way the community handles the death and burial of any particular member of the community.

The responsibility for this therefore rests on a cultic personnel headed by the chief priest of a particular

'deity', idionu responsible for the entire community, hence a communal deity, who also acts as the intermediary between the members of the community and the ancestors. This deity is called Utoken, which literarily means, 'the land of the village', but in actual fact, this is, by extension, not only the deity connected with ancestral matters, but also the deity that safeguards the traditional norms and values of the community. As a result, appropriate sanctions and taboos are laid down; those who fail to observe them are therefore visited upon with corresponding calamities. Such calamities may be averted only if certain redressive sacrifices are offered. For the community therefore, there are two types of divination, namely, divination connection with death, that is, post-mortem, and divination connected either with calamities provoked by the breaking of taboos or of a more general nature.

The instruments used during these two types of divination also differ. The one used for post-mortem is called aganaga, 'ladder', and the instrument for divination connected with other crises and calamities other than death is called ugbolo, 'staff'. The latter is a variation of the former which appears to have been introduced at a specific moment at Akaba. These may not be used by other individual diviners who operate on their own.

### Aganaga, 'Ladder' Divination

The aganaga, 'ladder' divination is the most popular and the most widespread type of divination practised in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta. It occurs in various forms and has attracted the attention of various scholars. The methods applied seem to vary slightly from one community to the other, nevertheless, they are all identical in the core. Professor Robin Horton who has concentrated most of his attention in the Niger Delta, in Kalabari area in particular, calls it ikpataka-dogi, and describes it as a Kalabari funeral rite.<sup>1</sup> Professor E.J. Alagoa, in his attempt to establish the cultural and historical affinities between the Kolokuma Ijo of the Central Niger Delta, and the Western Apoi community in Okitipupa Division, Ondo State, in Western Nigeria, gave a descriptive version of this divination as performed by members of this community who live in Yoruba land. The point is that in spite of the fact that the Apoi speak a dialect of the Yoruba, and therefore they could have been more closely linked with Ifa divination,<sup>2</sup> that is not the case. Rather, they have a divinatory practice called ikpatagha, almost spelt the same way as it is in Kalabari. It is called obebe or obebege in Nembe and other parts of Brass area.<sup>3</sup> But Philip E. Leis who worked among the Kolokuma Ijo in the Niger Delta, thinks this same type of divination is known to them as obebe,<sup>4</sup> similar to how it is called in <sup>the</sup> Nembe area.

In all these, including the aganaga practised in Epie-Atissa, the basic premise is the same. It is a post-mortem divination intended to establish the cause or causes of death. It is also intended to establish whether the person 'died well', technically known in Epie-Atissa dialect as uwu-vie, meaning, 'good death', therefore whether he or she should be given a befitting burial, or whether the deceased practised witchcraft and therefore should be treated as a 'bad death' and a curse, technically known as odieli. Apart from these basic similarities, there are certain fundamental differences between the ikpataka of Kalabari and the ikpatagha of Apoi, the obebe of Ijo and the aganaga of Epie-Atissa.

The first fundamental difference is in the aspect of popularity. As already indicated, the aganaga divination is a very popular practice in Epie-Atissa and among the Ijos in the Niger Delta, especially for the purpose of establishing the cause of death. But according to Robin Horton, the rite of ikpataka is fast disappearing "from many of the Kalabari communities",<sup>5</sup> because of their contact with some of the great oracles and shrines in Ibo area which they consider to be more effective and more reliable. In other words, ikataka dogi as a method of post mortem divination is no longer popular in Kalabari area. While Horton's reason for this decline may be correct, it could nonetheless mislead people into thinking that Kalabari people are simply abandoning ikpataka in preference for a more reliable substitute <sup>borrowed from</sup> the Ibos. Perhaps a more probable reason

for the decline of this rite in Kalabari area could be attributed to modernization as a result of the influence of Christianity. Historically, Kalabari area was among the first places in Nigeria to receive Christianity from Bishop Crowther in 1857-1878; and with it civilization and education from the Western world. As a result, it is the view of Professor Godwin Tasie that in places like Bakana in Kalabari area, devotees of certain traditional religions are fast diminishing because "the others had become Christian".<sup>7</sup> Consequently, they would prefer Christian burials based on Christian principles, thus causing the abandonment of cultural practices, such as ikpataka.

By contrast however, this situation is different in Epie-Atissa. Christianity came to Yenagoa, the principal town in Epie-Atissa, and headquarters of the Yenagoa Local Government Area, in 1912, <sup>through</sup> a man called Otobotekere, priest of several deities, converted in 1911.<sup>8</sup> This was more than 50 years after Kalabari had received Christianity. As a result, there is still a low level of literacy among the people. The church is not strong enough to present a powerful force, so the concept of Christian burial is not very popular. Therefore aganaga and related rituals predominate to the extent that it is a norm for all who die in Epie-Atissa, including church goers, to undergo post-mortem divination before being buried. The exceptions are very few, and only in families with strong Christian conviction.

The second difference between Horton's ikpataka and aganaga is in connection with the materials used for the construction. The description given by E.J. Alagoa concerning the construction of the ikpatagha divining frame among the Yoruba-speaking Apoi<sup>9</sup> is identical with the construction of aganaga in Epie-Atissa. It is constructed with two bamboo poles of about 5 feet long. These are then held together by three sticks of about 2 1/2 feet long each, at three points: at the two ends and at the centre. Specifically, the stick used is that made from a plant called obebebe, and securely tied to the bamboo with special ropes called uden, 'cane', which is from the genus Calamus. All the materials used are native to the land. Nothing foreign such as nails, twines or wires from the Western World are used in the construction of aganaga. This significant aspect and the meanings attached to it were not dealt with by Horton, Alagoa or Leis in their various descriptions. By ignoring this significant aspect, they failed to express the importance of signs and symbols in the interpretation of divination in specific relation to ikpataka of Kalabari, ikpatagha of Apoi and obebe of Ijo.

In order to determine the significance of the symbols in connection with aganaga in Epie-Atissa, Chief S.M. Ezekiel, a grade two teacher in the local community primary school, and obeneken, 'village head' of a village called Okaka in Epie clan, was interviewed, together with members of his Committee for Community Affairs, technically called Utoken, 'the ground of the village', on January 9, 1985, in his

residence. Chief S.M. Ezekiel became a teacher in 1960, and later attended the Teachers Training College, from 1975-1979. He was made obeneken of Okaka in 1963, after the death of Chief Samuel Kwekwe, the former obeneken, from whom he learnt about many important cultural secrets which are unknown to many ordinary citizens, before he died. He is about 50 years old.

In his view, he thinks the bamboo which is used in constructing the frame of the aganaga is significant because it symbolizes 'truth', technically known in Epie dialect as, isini-tonmu. Here isini means 'something', and tonmu means, 'that which is weighty' or 'important'. By extension, it means 'truth' in contrast to that which is evil, insignificant, therefore unimportant. Usually, isini-tonmu, 'truth', contrasts with ikpe, 'false' or 'lie'. The bamboo itself may not be that important, but its importance lies in the function it performs when a mud building is constructed. For example, mud buildings are usually constructed with strong poles that hold the frame; then the bamboos are split into two, and tied to the poles with ropes, locally called uden, that hold the mud in place. Bamboos are also used to hold the thatch together over the roof. Therefore bamboos constitute one of the most important materials used for the construction of mud buildings. It is this importance that is emphasized by the use of the word, isini-tonmu, which does not seem to have a proper English rendering except, 'truth'. Mud buildings have persisted in Epie-Atissa until comparatively recently, especially since

the late 1950s, to the oil boom in Nigeria, in 1960-1970, when most people were able to afford block buildings. Earlier people thought they would die if they built modern buildings. Thus although most people in the villages now live in modern buildings, it is correct to say that almost all persons in Epie-Atissa, except those born recently, grew up in mud buildings.

It is therefore the view of Chief S.M. Ezekiel and his Utoken elders, that the bamboo is a 'witness', eseri, a word in Epie-Atissa which conveys identical meaning as 'umpire', to all the actions and innermost thoughts of the individual during his or her lifetime in the mud building. No action, whether performed by day or night would escape the notice of the bamboos, locally called ukóó. As a result, the ukóó would undoubtedly know, after the person's death, whether he or she was good or evil. The ukóó could not lie; it would speak the truth. Hence it is used as the frame for the construction of aganaga.

The second material used for the construction of aganaga is a plant called obelebele, which is usually planted in places normally designated for deities, locally called uto-idiomu. In Epie-Atissa, obelebele is not only used as a sign of uto-idiomu but it is also used to demarcate boundaries, burial grounds, and more specifically, 'shrines' or ugula. It is a tree that grows and multiplies easily, and is durable. It does not wither and die easily. It therefore signifies 'good' or isini-vie. It does not support 'evil',



isini dieli. As a result, the stem of the obelebele which is strong and solid is used as cross bars at the two ends and also at the centre, holding the ukóó frame in place. It represents divinity, who knows the thoughts and intents of man's heart, and his judgment is impartial.

The third and final material used is the uden, 'rope' made from cane. Factory made ropes like twine are forbidden, because by tradition, such are neither used in constructing mud buildings nor are they used in the roofing. Uden is best because it does not rot easily, especially when covered with mud while constructing mud buildings. It is also symbolic of 'good', isini-vie; it is durable, dependable, grows wild in the forest, hence always available.

It is the view of Chief S.M. Ezekiel that these three 'witnesses', technically known as igbani eseri, namely, ukóó, uden and obelebele, cannot be tricked especially by those who had practised witchcraft or committed certain atrocities during their lifetime, into saying that they had been 'good'. Here eseri is already known, and igbani, means 'they', given in the plural form. They would no doubt expose every known secret. Hence the aganaga is an instrument of judgment after death. It performs the function of the 'prosecution witness', the priest and his train perform the functions of the 'jury' and the 'judge'; while those who carry the aganaga on their shoulders during the divinatory seance, perform the function of the 'police'. Collectively, they ensure that those under arrest are given

fair trials. In other words, they constitute the traditional judicial system whose judgment there is no appeal.

#### Aganaga Divination Seance at Akaba for Witchcraft

What is about to be described took place at a little village called Akaba, with an estimated population of about 900 inhabitants. It is situated East of Yenagoa, along the Atissa creek and can be reached from Yenagoa by water transport only. The occasion was the death of a middle aged man called Ishmael Binadomu who died on Tuesday, 24th July, 1985.

According to tradition, <sup>when a person dies,</sup> a secret aganaga divination was quickly carried out by the immediate members of his family in the presence of the priest of utoken, 'the ground of the village', and his worshippers who also superintend the 'ancestral spirits' called inibudu. But, again as is traditional, this type of divination is usually carried out in the night, immediately following the death before it is announced. Only at this time, the most authoritative 'ladder' or aganaga, the village ancestral aganaga, known as aganaga utoken, 'ladder of the ancestors of the land', is the one used first. Then later, usually on the following day before the person is buried, the person's own aganaga is quickly constructed and destroyed after the

post-mortem divination exercise. This second stage is never done in secret, but in an open place during the day to which all persons, men, women and children can attend freely. It is only after this second divination exercise that the person is buried either on that day, if it is established that he had practised sorcery, hence 'bad death', or on the following day if the person 'died well'. In the latter case, the burial is then preceded by an all night wake-keeping, with singing, dancing, merriment that could be riotous because of the excess drinking, especially if the person 'died well' at a good old age.

Unfortunately, Ishmael Binadomu did not 'die well'. The first aganaga divinatory exercise declared him a sorcerer. It was therefore necessary to ascertain the extent of damage done with reference to the number of persons he had killed in the community, in a seance,<sup>10</sup> a public gathering in the village square, during which the extent of damage done, is publicly investigated by means of aganaga divination. This took place on Wednesday, 25th July, 1985, at about 2 pm. But the corpse had already been buried long before then, near the banks of the river, technically called ubu-asa, which according to custom, is a place designated for burying such people.

Virtually all the inhabitants of the village having now assembled at the appointed place and time, seated to take control of the divination exercise were 3 persons. The first person was Simeon Tinbiri, the chief priest of Orisa

and Aruku-egene, the two most important idiomu, which have made Akaba one of the most important centres of divination in Epie-Atissa. The chief priest has 4 wives and 8 children, and practises subsistence farming as his occupation. He was about 48 years' old. It is reported that his father was the Anglican Church leader at Akaba before he died, but all his children are non-Christians. He had no formal education.

The second person was Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken, 'ground of the village', who also controls the ancestral spirits in the land. He is also an illiterate of about 50 years old. He has two wives and 7 children.

The third person was Donkimi Kimiokrogha, about 75 years old, who was formerly the high priest of all these deities but had gradually disengaged himself to allow those of the younger generation to take over. At the time of discussion, he was a widower, having lost his two wives. He also died soon after this interview, late in 1985. One of his wives was the Anglican Church leader among the women. He had 8 children and his first son is the present obeneken, 'village head' of Akaba. Chief Donkimi was a major stabilizing force in the affairs of the community because of his maturity, experience and wisdom in dealing and directing the people.

While these three persons directed the divinatory exercise, four other persons carried the aganaga on their shoulders. They were: Ogbolo Tinbiri, about 52 years old, priest of



PLATE 1 - Aganaga divination at Akaba on Wednesday, 25th July, 1985 at 2 p.m., in connection with Ishmael Binadomu who died practising witchcraft. From front right are Ogbolo Tinbiri, and Yogoi Johnie, front left; Aziza Wilson, rear right, and Kio Deinkori, rear left.



PLATE 2 - Controlling the aganaga divination at Akaba was Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Orisa and Aruku-egene, pouring libations to the ancestors.

beni-kurukuru, a personal deity, married to one wife and has 2 children. He stood on the front, right of the aganaga. To the front, left, stood Yogoi Johnie, husband of one wife, and father of 6 children; about 45 years old. Aziza Wilson, about 30 years old; has 3 wives and 7 children, took the back, right-hand side. Finally, Kio Deinkori, assistant priest of beni-kurukuru, stood at the back, left. All these persons have participated in the exercise of aganaga 'ladder' divination for several years, and are therefore highly experienced in the cultic practice. But they are all illiterates who practise subsistence farming as their main occupation. (See Plate 1, showing the four persons mentioned and the aganaga frame).

The stage was now set and people either stood or sat down around the field, very anxious to hear the extent of damage done by Ishmael. The chief priest, Simeon Tinbiri poured the necessary libations of hot drink locally called kaikai to inibudu, 'the ancestors'. He did this standing up, to accord the ancestors their due respect. (See Plate 2 showing the chief priest pouring libation). As he poured the libation, he told the ancestors why the divinatory exercise was taking place; as it were, summoning the soul of Ishmael to judgment. And since the 'ladder', aganaga was prepared in the traditional manner specifically for Ishmael, the chief priest called him by his first name, and asked him to respond to all questions and statements directed to him. Somehow, his spirit animated the aganaga, and these 4



**PLATE 3** - Note the sign language of aganaga divination.



persons who have been trained in the cultic practice, and therefore familiar with the language of aganaga divination, moved accordingly, sometimes making signs on the ground. (See Plate 3).

Before continuing, there are a few differences which should be noted between what occurs here as first described, and some aspects of ikpataka divination in Kalabari, described by Robin Horton. Talking about Bene's funeral rite at Soku, he said 6 men carried the ikpataka, which in this case is the coffin of the deceased, made of red mangrove sticks.<sup>11</sup> This difference is worth noting because the aganaga at Akaba was not borne by 6 men, but 4. And what they carried was the aganaga frame; not the coffin of Ishmael, even if he had died well. It is also significant to note that while mangrove sticks are used to construct ikpataka, "lashed with screw pine thread"<sup>12</sup> at Soku, at Akaba and in Epie-Atissa in general, bamboo and obelebele sticks are used, lashed with cane rope. Furthermore, the construction of ikpataka is done with 7 sticks, which number is regarded as being sacred in Kalabari rituals. In Epie-Atissa, the 3 sticks from obelebele are used to hold the two long bamboos together at 3 points, as already indicated. And the number 3 is an important odd number associated with men, therefore regarded as sacred. According to Kay Williamson and A.O. Timitimi, the number seven is associated with the great deities among the Kolokuma Ijo of the Niger Delta; the odd number three for men, and even number four for women.<sup>13</sup> But since the





**PLATE 4** - Aganaga diviners at Okaka in Epie clan. Note the differences between the diviners here and those at Akaba in Atissa clan, in Plate 2.

males dominate in Epie-Atissa society, the three sticks used to hold the bamboos together signify not only the male number but also the ancestral spirits, all of which are regarded as males. Aganaga is therefore constructed in the same way for both men and women.

Another significant difference worth noting was that mentioned by E.J. Alagoa in connection with ikpatagha of Apoi. He indicated that after the construction of the frame, two pieces of "cloth which have been used in stuffing the mouths of dead chiefs and preserved"<sup>14</sup> in the village shrine are tied to the middle cross stick, before other rituals associated with the divinatory exercise begin. He also said in the case of Nembe, parts of the dead man, such as nails and hair, together with medicinal roots, are "tied to the central cross stick."<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that such do not occur in Epie-Atissa. In fact it is considered as taboo against inibudu, 'the ancestors', to do so. There are however some noticeable variations in the way aganaga divination is conducted at a place called Okaka, in Epie clan, as against what obtains at Akaba in Atissa clan (see Plate 4). There, the chief priest who conducts the divinatory seance holds his staff of office in his left hand, and a piece of bamboo, called iferi, in the right hand. Already the importance of 'bamboo', ukóó has been discussed (see p.41). The chief may thus hold the iferi in his hand throughout the duration of the exercise, or pin it on to the aganaga, at any particular moment.

Three palm fronds are tied to three places on the front cross bar. Culturally, palm fronds are usually associated with death. So three palm fronds would indicate that the person on account of whom the exercise is being conducted, is male. Nothing is tied to the aganaga if it is female. Again, all those participating in the divinatory exercise at Okaka, especially the chief and the four men bearing the aganaga, are all bare bodied. They tie cloth around their waists, or over the trousers if they are worn. Ideally, people bearing the aganaga prefer to be bare-footed since that is more traditional. The chief holds the staff to defend himself from being pushed down by the diviners.

The team at Akaba, on the other hand, were very well dressed, by comparison; two of them even had hats on, probably in order to beat the hot sun. In place of the hat, a number of the members of the team at Okaka, including the chief priest, have palm fronds tied around their heads. The chief priest's head is even clean-shaved, probably indicative of the mourning mood.

Apart from these differences, the method of aganaga divination is identical in all parts of Epie-Atissa. If the person on account of whom the divinatory exercise is being conducted had a grown up son, he presents a bottle of kaikai, 'palm wine gin' to the chiefs and elderly members of utoken. Then he sits next to the chief before the exercise begins. Ishmael did not have a grown up son so this aspect was ignored. Even if he had, the son could refuse to

perform in that capacity in a public seance in order to avoid being put to shame.

A noteworthy technical term used in connection with such a divinatory seance, is pulu-aganaga. Here, pulu means, 'to ask' or 'to inquire from' or 'consult with' aganaga. The concept of isini-tonmu as regards the importance of the aganaga and the materials used in constructing it has already been discussed (see above, p.41). Thus, in Epie-Atissa thought, failure to perform the rite of pulu-aganaga following the death of a member of the community, is tantamount to failure to grasp the import of isini-tonmu, which is the acceptable and expected standard. That is the proper and right thing to do, it cannot be otherwise. Therefore what is about to be described in connection with the death of Ishmael, and all other related or similar events, are episodes in Epie-Atissa thought which constitute the performance of isini-tonmu, or 'noble task'.

One way to know if someone 'died well', ovie, or 'evil', odieli, is to watch how the aganaga turns initially at the start of the divinatory exercise. For example, if the person is ovie, the aganaga will turn from the right to the left hand side. But if he or she is odieli, it will turn from left to the right, thus, the way the aganaga turns determines the fate of the person. In the case of Ishmael, he turned from the left to the right; he was therefore declared a wizard or sorcerer, technically known as onyo-ida. This translates for the term, diriguokeme, a word

for 'sorcerer' in Kolokuma, indicated by Philip Leis in his account of divination at the time of death among the Kolokuma Ijo.<sup>16</sup>

Now the chief priest, Simeon Tinbiri, directed the 'divinatory seance', pulu-aganaga, methodically in order to ascertain the extent of damage done. Their assignment could be comparable to that of a 'civil commission of inquiry' in which the members must strive to get at the root of the matter in order to arrive at a meaningful solution to the problem. Thus, the chief priest, acting as the Chairman, was assisted by Orderly Torotein and Donkimi Kimiokrogha, both of whom are seasoned in such matters. Taking the initiative, the chief priest said:

Ishmael, you are dead. 'You are dead', wo wum, and after turning your hand', gili ubo wo, you said you died practising ida, 'witchcraft'. We will therefore do what is usually done, according to 'our custom', isini wulem ede, in such circumstances, 'from time immemorial', ifie namade. Unwa was the person who made the law. Unwa also went wrong, so he has since died too. Since Unwa who made the law also died because he failed to keep the law, it means all those who fail to keep the 'Law of Unwa', oloko Unwa,<sup>17</sup> must die. That is why you died. Having died, you know all those who are members of your gang, 'the witchcraft cult', igbani ogbo ida. You must call all of them to follow you. They must not be allowed to live. Should you fail to call your 'cultic members', igbani ogbo ba, no matter their number; be they 3, 4, 5 or more, to follow you, then 'you cannot cross over', wo me bein dubu, to the land beyond, 'the country of the dead', eken gbani wem. We therefore 'pour your libation', dibeze idi wo, for your consumption today, because you are dead. Now 'you may drink', bo da idi.

Having made his preliminary remarks, the chief priest took the bottle of Kaikai that was kept near by for this purpose and filled the little glass customarily used for serving drinks during such occasions. The size is one quarter the size of a normal drinking glass. It is this glass that is traditionally used in serving drinks, especially locally brewed hot drink, Kaikai,<sup>18</sup> in this and other occasions related to idiomu. Because it is so small, the glass is usually filled when served, and it prevents people from getting easily drunk in the course of their duties.

Having filled the glass, the chief priest does not drink it first. The aganaga must first be served. So he poured the entire contents on the ground, in front of those carrying it. The aganaga then nodded, with a forward motion, indicating acceptance. Then the chief priest filled another glass and drank it himself. The other two priests were then served. This caused a brief moment of interlude, during which people began to whisper to one another in subdued tones about the problem Ishmael has caused. People glanced with pity at his wife who was standing in the crowd with other women. But the process of drinking was soon over, and the chief priest resumed his assignment.

Continuing, the chief priest began by explaining a few details so that both the living and the dead would hear. In effect, he indicated that what was available in the land of Akaba is also available in all other places. Ishmael has died, and he has revealed that he was evil. He confessed

when the aganaga was consulted last night that he killed 20 persons, both young and old. He killed 10 persons at Yenagoa, his maternal home. As a result, he, Simeon, has poured the appropriate libation and the necessary invocation has been made in accordance with 'the law of Unwa'. He then called upon 'the things of the village', ikpese eken,<sup>19</sup> the ancestors, who made the law. Now that Ishmael was dead they were implored to team up with Ishmael and kill all persons who are still alive today, either at Akaba or at Yenagoa, who are members of Ishmael's cult. As 'members of Ishmael's cult', igbani ogbo Ishmael, they are bent on doing evil things by killing innocent people, both young and old.

Therefore, 'the things that are in the area', ikpese ede, in the land of Akaba and Yenagoa, are implored to join hands with Ishmael, now dead for his evil deeds, and kill all such evil doers.

At this point, there seemed to be an unintended pause by the chief. As if propelled by a great force, the aganaga swerved, first to the left, then to the right, and finally stood still in front of the chief priest. Resuming, the chief priest directed his invocation this time at inibudu, 'the ancestors'. With a somewhat angry tone, he exclaimed:

Should you fail to participate with Ishmael to eliminate those who are doing such evil things, then ovuo ede diye baze, 'the covenant which operates in the area should take care of you'. But if you participate with Ishmael to eliminate these evil, cultic people, then ovuo ede tete gbiye ba, 'the covenant in the area should not kill you'.



**PLATE 5** - Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Orisa and Aruku-egene performing his invocations during aganaga divination at Akaba.



Having said this, the chief priest poured some more libations and invited inibudu, 'the ancestors' to drink. As a result, there was a pause. Then resuming, he continued by saying:

It is a fact to both small and great that Ishmael is dead. Ishmael's hand has been turned; invocation will now be directed at his aganaga. We pray that inibudu should join hands with Ishmael and fight against all those who are doing evil in the area. Only then will Ishmael be able to cross over to the other world. Otherwise, Ishmael cannot cross over. Inibudu, we therefore implore you to fight this fight with Ishmael. This is your drink, your libation.

(See plate 5, showing the chief priest performing his invocations).

Libations were poured again to inibudu by the chief priest. As a result, there was another pause to allow inibudu time to accept the drink offering. Again, the aganaga nodded positively, indicating acceptance. After that, Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken now took over the task of interrogating Ishmael.

"Now your matter is finished. We have offered the drink offerings, and the necessary invocations have been made".

As soon as the priest of Utoken stopped speaking, suddenly, there was a forceful movement by those bearing the aganaga. They made several motions, turned round, stood still



PLATE 6 - Aganaga diviners during Ishmael's post-mortem divination at Onyema's doorstep, indicating that Onyema was a victim of Ishmael's witchcraft practices.

briefly, as if waiting to receive a clear direction, then moved on and touched the chief priest now seated, then touched a lady sitting nearby, then went forward speedily and touched the door of a house in the neighbourhood, across the field, owned by a lady called Onyema. (This happened just when some more people from his maternal family at Yenagoa arrived). The aganaga left Onyema's house, came back to the field and went straight into the midst of the women, touching the lap of a woman called Maina. (See Plate 6, showing the aganaga at Onyema's door).

Having noted this, the priest of Utoken continued, with a view to finding out what things were yet to be revealed. He spoke thus:

In spite of the fact that we thought your matter has ended, you have indicated that there are some more revelations left by touching this woman, Asaka. From there you went to Onyema's door post. You have been told already that except you completely reveal all the evils you have done, you cannot cross over to the other land. Should you go without revealing all the secret deeds you have done, it will not be long before wo tueno wo, 'you will suffer spiritual rejection'. And this might cause you to undergo another aganaga divination exercise over there. But over here, we are human beings and there could be no further rejection. You will also be powerless to harm anybody, whether young or old. And we will no longer perform another divination exercise as a result of your death and misdeeds. We have stopped; when we say we have stopped, we have stopped indeed. Therefore you are now allowed to reveal all the evil things you have done. It is now open for you to do so.

Having said this, the aganaga now moved around, and wrote a few things on the ground that cannot be deciphered by the

layman. But to those who were involved in the divinatory exercise, every movement and the hieroglyphics on the ground were meaningful. For example, according the Chief S.M. Ezekiel, obeneken of Okaka, if the diviners made certain signs on the ground, it meant the deceased offended the ancestors by sinning against the land. If they made a circle such as 'O', that meant the deceased fished in a pond unauthorized. The deity in charge of that pond has to be appeased, otherwise others in the family may also die suddenly. For these and other reasons, they watched the movements of the aganaga very attentively in order to capture and to interpret every movement as accurately as possible. They would otherwise have to accept full responsibility for any catastrophe arising from their carelessness.

Having now captured the details, the priest of Utoken proceeded with his interrogation:

"Ishmael, we thought it is finished. But as soon as you saw people from nyeni biliwo, 'your mother's birth place', Yenagoa, you turned round and touched two women, Maina and Onyema. Have you done something wrong to these people? Is that why you are touching them?"

The aganaga nodded with a forward movement to confirm that something was wrong indeed and must be revealed. Hence proceeding, the priest of Utoken began to ask a number of 'yes' or 'no' questions, as follows:

"All these people you have touched; have you crossed them with evil spells?"

In response, the aganaga objected by a backward movement, meaning, "no". Consequently, a number of questions were asked in order to eliminate the wrong ones and to ascertain what was right.

"These people you have indicated, you said you have not crossed them with evil medicine. Is it with regard to pregnancy? Were you planning to kill them?"

To all these questions, the aganaga made backward motions, indicating, "No". Proceeding, the priest said: "But you have done something to these people". The aganaga now affirmed, with a forward motion, meaning, "Yes". The priest, having received the clue, picked up from where he left and said:

As for Onyema, there is an assignment God has given to her. You went to her door steps. You know Onyema does the work of delivering women. But for some time now, her hand work is no longer good. When women from other places come to be delivered by her, it is sad to say the children usually die during child birth. Perhaps you are responsible for these unfortunate occurrences?

In response, the aganaga nodded positively to affirm, and some of the women began to hiss in a sympathetic manner. Then all eyes went in the direction of Onyema in amazement. This was followed by a moment of silence as the priest continued:

All these misfortunes of Onyema have to do with your evil spell on her? In the past, the aganaga was capable of showing us leaves or herbs that could be used as potion to counter and dispel such evil spells. But now, they are no longer effective because evil people have tampered with that aspect of our work. Nevertheless, by your confession, the power of that spell has been made null and void, and of no effect. Therefore nothing will worry Onyema again. It is finished.

Again the aganaga nodded affirmatively. But the priest was reminded that Onyema's case was not the only one. There were also those of Asaka, Bill's wife, and Maina, Aziza Wilson's wife, one of the four persons bearing the aganaga. Thus reminded, the priest continued:

You have also done something evil to Asaka, Bill's wife. It is part of the evil you have committed for which you have suffered death. If you have caused miscarriages in women, that is also an aspect of killing. Did you kill by causing her recent miscarriage?

The aganaga once again responded positively. There were a few murmurings, then silence, as people were anxious to get all the details. The priest now continued with his interrogation with regard to Maina, Aziza's wife.

"You also touched Maina, Aziza's wife. You have done her something evil as well". The aganaga nodded and the priest began to enumerate some of the calamities this woman has suffered recently and to ascertain whether he was responsible for them all.



**PLATE 7** - Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, the oldest man present during the aganaga divination at Akaba, with his right hand outstretched, calling for order. Seated to his left, is Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken.

Ishmael, Maina has experienced a number of miscarriages. She has also lost a child this year. Were you responsible for all these calamities? You were responsible for the death of her child this year. Are all these included in the total number of deaths committed by you?

The aganaga responded to all these questions, thus causing another moment of grief and bewilderment to Maina, and an embarrassment to Aziza, who was bearing the aganaga. Those who knew their problems listened with disbelief, and tension began to rise. Sensing the situation, Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, the oldest man present, broke his silence. He called the audience to order and reminded them that it had not ended. The aganaga then came close to him to acknowledge his presence. (See Plate 7, with the chief's hand outstretched, calling for order. Seated to his left, is Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken). Once order was restored the priest of Utoken continued.

He asked if Ishmael still had something more to say, but the aganaga made a negative motion, indicating he has revealed everything. By this time, the exercise had taken several hours. It was getting to the cool of the evening and there would be darkness very soon. Those who were bearing the aganaga were now tired. Those present had also listened enough to the horrible deeds of Ishmael. It was therefore a relief when it finally came to an end. But it was not ended until the aganaga was taken down from the shoulders of the



bearers.

Thus, with a shout by the chief priest, he said: "Ishmael, we will now stop; we will now stop; we have stopped."

With this, the aganaga was taken down by the bearers from their shoulders and all was finally over.

### Terms and Concepts used in Aganaga Divination in Epie Atissa

An attempt will now be made to explain certain technical terms used during the divinatory seance which are peculiar to Epie-Atissa thought and culture.

First, is the concept of the dead, with particular regard to inibudu, 'the ancestors'. Noteworthy is the fact that nobody becomes inibudu until the person is dead. Simeon Tinbiri wanted both the living and the dead to know that Ishmael was no longer alive, when he emphatically said, wo wum, meaning, 'you are dead'. Here wo, means, 'you' and wum, means, 'dead', a word coined from the noun, uwu, 'death', the cessation of life. From uwu, the word wem is derived, meaning 'that which is dead'. According to Epie-Atissa grammar, the word wu, 'die', is the present tense of wum, past tense, meaning 'expired'. As could be seen in the case of Ishmael, 'death', uwu is a disaster which affects the entire community; thus the entire community has the right to know why the person died and how he or she died. Hence one very important function of the

aganaga is that it is a means of communication between the living and dead in order to ascertain these facts. No-one dared call Ishmael a sorcerer while he was still alive. But now dead, the aganaga which has been culturally and ritually prepared for him, represents him. Therefore whatever is found against him by means of aganaga divination conducted publicly becomes the empirical evidence. Philip E. Leis refers to this as "collective sentiments",<sup>20</sup> a phrase which does not really portray the depth of reality attached to aganaga divination in Epie-Atissa. There is nothing emotional about aganaga divination at Akaba, as described. To them, it is a very serious matter during which nobody neither weeps nor gets drunk as to be emotional, because it is an occasion in which all must be sober.

Hence, the occasion could be better referred to as, 'the notion of empirical evidence', because it is "accounted for by common sense",<sup>21</sup> which is the behaviour that is intelligible, and the whole effect, manifest.

The fact that aganaga divination and the results acquired are empirical evidence, according to Epie-Atissa thought, could be seen in some of the expressions used during the exercise. For example, the chief priest referred to the turning of the aganaga by the bearers as 'turning Ishmael's hand'. The language used is gili ubo wo, and wo, means 'you'. Here the dead and buried is addressed in anthropomorphic terms, because it was he who animated the aganaga, and turned it in such a way as to declare himself

someone who practised 'witchcraft', ida. This being the case, it is 'customary in the area', isini wulem ede, 'from time immemorial', ifie namade, to get the details. The 'empirical notion' also comes from the fact that it is customary, beginning from the founding fathers to the present time. Thus the expression, ifie namade, 'time immemorial', is an invocation by the chief priest of the age-old mandate from the ancestors.

A question that needs to be answered, is 'who are the ancestors?' There are two views to this question, namely the Epie clan view and the Atissa clan view. The Epie clan view is represented by Chief S.M. Ezekiel, obeneken of Okaka, and members of his 'cabinet'. According to this view, one becomes an ancestor, inibudu, if one lived to a good old age, and died well. Furthermore, if during his life time, he performed great deeds such as killing wild animals like obein, 'lion', oturugo, 'elephant', and in the days of old, to have killed a human being through physical combat. For such persons, a ceremony called okumo, which is associated with 'chivalry' ukali must be performed, in accordance with the laws of the land. Otherwise, it is believed that the heads of animals or of the human being will have a psychological and spiritual effect on him. Following the ceremonies, the man consequently receives a higher status in society, and after his death, his aganaga also receives special status. People believed that he was a brave man and will be braver still after death to speak forth boldly as an ancestor.

The Atissa clan version of how someone becomes inibudu is somehow different from the Epie clan version. It is the view of both Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken and members of his council at Famgbe, one of the most prominent centres of divination in Atissa clan, and Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Orisa and Aruku-egene at Akaba, also one of the most prominent centres of divination in Atissa, that inibudu as a term for 'ancestor' in Atissa clan refers to anybody that has died, irrespective of sex or age. As soon as a person dies, and once buried, especially according to traditional fashion, the soul or spirit of that person, known as osio, becomes inibudu.

But there are two categories of inibudu, namely, the good or bad inibudu. For example, someone who died practising witchcraft is regarded as bad inibudu, and therefore incapable of protecting any family. He will neither require nor merit any libation. But if the person died well, it is customary to pour the first few drops of hot drink, especially Kaikai, or any other drink, to the late father or mother, and ask for protection at home and during journeys and also before embarking upon any major adventure.

They have their abode in 'the country of the dead', called due-ama among the Ijo-speaking block, or eken-gban-wem, in Epie-Atissa dialect. No one knows where this 'country' is except Izibe, 'God'. They think this is comparable to the 'mystery' of pregnancy, child-birth and death. No one knows

from where the child came, and at death, it is believed, he returns to where he came.

As a principle, a bad inibudu could not perpetrate any evil against former members of its family because its wickedness ended with its death. But a good inibudu could react because it could be angered and appeased. Whenever it is angered and it reacts, the Epie terminology for that is twene. The reason for such reaction or twene by inibudu can only be discerned through divination. One occasion, however, when an evil inibudu may twene, 'react', is if one died practising witchcraft and was buried, as if he or she died well, in the cemetery or burial ground set aside for those who died well. In that case, the good inibudu will 'react' and cause people to be sick. People may die in that particular family and the village may not experience peace until the remains of the evil person had been exhumed and buried in the proper place set aside for them.

Thus inibudu have their own kind of existence that goes on after death. They have their own domain and do their best to preserve it; but those who died well have theirs separate from the bad ones. And in many respects, inibudu is equivalent to idiomu, 'deity'. It could be worshipped or revered.<sup>22</sup> As a result, time was when it was taboo to have sex with girls from the same family or descent. This was equivalent to invoking inibudu on one's self. Similarly, no one was to have intercourse with women in the same family. It was an offence against inibudu for failing to report

about a known amorous relationship between one's brother's wife and someone else. It was also an offence against inibudu for one to act as a go-between, a married woman in one's family and any man outside that family. It was also against inibudu to bear malice against someone by planning to hurt him following a quarrel. All such offences against inibudu attracted the penalty of death. Inibudu therefore helps to keep law and order.

The concept in the Epie-Atissa of inibudu, 'ancestors' also establishes a cosmology in which they confuse Izibe, 'God' with idiomu, 'deity'. For example, some members of Chief S.M. Ezekiel's 'cabinet' think Izibe and idiomu are brothers, people of the same father and mother. But more specifically, those in Simeon Tinbiri's camp think Izibe created idiomu and the whole universe, including man. And like man, idiomu owes its existence to Izibe who is more powerful. Man lives in the physical world, called okpo, which is full of misfortunes - pain, hardship, sickness and finally death. The soul, osio, then goes, as already said, to eken-gban-wem, 'the abode of the dead', where they become inibudu. As practised elsewhere in Africa and specially among the Ga of Southern Ghana, "their spiritual presence may be invoked to assist the living",<sup>23</sup> either interventionally or as in the case of Ishmael, to act in their own right.

The second concept worth noting is the Epie-Atissa concept of ida, 'witchcraft'. The belief in witchcraft is strong in

the area probably because, as indicated by White, "it is the result of being born and brought up in a society in which it is inherent."<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is a concept which strikes fear into the heart and mind of the average man or woman in Epie-Atissa. Witchcraft practitioners are generally held responsible for all misfortunes in the family and without the family. The only remedy is the elimination of the practitioner, together with 'all those in the covenant', referred to technically as, igbani ogbo ida. Here the meaning of ida, is already known. The word igbani, means, 'those', and ogbo is 'group' or 'cult'. It was implied by Simeon Tinbiri, the chief priest, that Ishmael had his own covenant, referred to as, igbani ogbo ba, in which the word 'ba', is a possessive pronoun, meaning 'your', attributed to Ishmael. The point is, all must be eliminated, even if that means the elimination of the entire community. But only inibudu, 'the ancestors', have the ability to perform this task. According to Epie-Atissa thought, inibudu could refuse Ishmael's entry to 'the country of the dead', eken gbani wem. Once this sanction is taken against him, he will remain suspended, having no abode in either this world or the other. Hence he 'cannot cross over', wo me bein dubu, until he had dealt with all those in his covenant. Again, the word, wo is 'you' in the singular, masculine or feminine gender; me is a negative expression, 'cannot', and bein, is the verb, 'to cross', with dubu conveying the meaning of 'over'.

The third concept is with regard to 'libation', known in

Epie-Atissa as dibeze idi, literally meaning, 'putting down drink'. This contrasts with another concept, nwense idi, meaning, 'pour drink'. Ordinarily, libation should go with the verb, 'to pour', nwense; but in Epie-Atissa thought, libation goes with the verb, 'to put', dibeze, for two reasons. First, since ancestors, inibudu, are revered, the verb of 'putting' portrays a greater degree of reverence than the verb of 'pouring'. The priest or whoever may be concerned, would rather 'put' the drink down reverentially to the ancestors than 'pour'. Secondly, during his life time, the ancestor also participated together with other members of the family and the entire community, during which he also bought idi, 'drinks', which he 'put down', dibeze, on the table for all to drink. He did not 'pour'. The pouring was done only when authorised in the form of "sharing in a common meal",<sup>25</sup> through which the participants create avenues for mutual and social harmony, both for the living and the dead. This is what is commonly known as 'commensality'.

Ishmael drank and ate freely with his peers during his life time, during which they discussed freely. As inibudu, his behaviour may not be different, so in the course of the divinatory seance, Simeon Tinbiri, the chief priest remembered, after pouring libation in the customary manner, isini wulem ede, specifically poured some to Ishmael, inviting him to drink. This is portrayed in the statement, bo da idi, 'now drink'. Following this the aganaga became animated. Thus, things are done very gently in order not to



offend inibudu, but to lure into positive action.

The fourth aspect indicated in the divinatory seance is with regard to the fact that Ishmael Binadomu was always addressed throughout the duration of the exercise by his first name, and not by his surname. This is because according to Epie-Atissa culture, people are usually addressed by their first names. This lays emphasis upon the kinship system, which is "a system of categories of relationship to any individual",<sup>26</sup> in which there is paternal as well as maternal kin. These two constitute 'kindred', with kinship ties that are "organized on the basis of lineages".<sup>27</sup> Lineage could be defined as "a corporate descent group whose members claim descent from a common ancestor and can trace their genealogical links to that ancestor."<sup>28</sup> It is this genealogical system that constitutes the clan, as in the case of Epie-Atissa clans. Noteworthy is the fact that such kinship ties are particularly important to people in the little village of Akaba in particular, and Epie-Atissa in general, because they help to maintain peace and solidarity.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Ishmael was a member of the peer group of both Simeon Tinbiri, the chief priest, and Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken. Though separated by death, as kin, they had always addressed themselves in their first names.

The fifth point worth mentioning is with regard to the concept of 'invocation'. In Epie-Atissa dialect, it is

called, wali-isini, in which wali is 'to invoke', and isini, again means 'something'. Thus wali-isini means, 'to invoke something'. According to Epie-Atissa culture, invocations are done in three ways; two are at the individual levels, and the third, at the level of the priest or his representative.

Firstly, all invocations are restricted to males only because it is closely related to the pouring of libation to inibudu. Women may pour libation only if it is done in the context of a priestess offering sacrifice to her personal 'deity', idiomu. But any male individual may offer 'drink offering', dibeze idi to the ancestors for whatever reason and at whatever time. For example, he may dibeze idi to the late mother and father, imploring them for protection, prosperity and good will before venturing out to fishing, hunting, farming, trading, or any business expedition.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore always linked with the concept of divination.

A second type of invocation performed by an individual mostly for the purpose of recovering stolen items is called, guru-iseni. In this case, the word guru is a cognate of gure, meaning, 'to unravel' or 'scatter', and iseni, is a cognate of isi, meaning 'bottom' or 'root'. Thus, the expression, guru-iseni means 'to scatter or unravel from the root'. It is therefore an invocation, the purpose of which is to unravel the problem from the root, and therefore adequately punish the evil doer. It therefore relates to occasions when things have been stolen, in which the grieved

party invokes a dangerous idiomu to look into the matter. Conditions are given in such circumstances. For example, after invoking the idiomu, the matter may be dispensed with only on the condition that the thief surrenders the item, and in addition also pays certain sums of money both to the grieved party and also to the idiomu. Sometimes the conditions could be really grievous, and almost impossible, thus leading to several deaths in the culprit's family. Any aggrieved male or female member of the community may perform this type of invocation in order to arrive at the truth. A good example of this was an incident which occurred at Yenagoa, the capital town in Epie-Atissa, in February, 1986. It was discovered through aganaga divination that the premature death of a certain young man was because he stole someone's transistor radio, and sold it for money. The person invoked one of the most capricious deities in the area called seibiri-ekine.<sup>31</sup> The thief died within weeks of the invocation, and to avoid further deaths in the family, his parents and relatives collectively managed to revoke and disannul the invocation, in which in addition to the lost soul, they paid more than ten times the cost of the radio. There is therefore an adage in Epie-Atissa that the thief destroys the entire family'.

The third type of invocation was the one performed by Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest Arukuegene and priest of Orisa in connection with Ishmael's divination exercise. No ordinary person could have performed in the way he did, in which inibudu was involved in accordance with isini wulem ede,

'the people's customary ways', ifie namade, 'time immemorial', oloko Unwa, 'Unwa's law', and ovuo ede, 'the covenant in the area'. It should be noted that the authenticity of the entire seance depended on such invocations. Divination in this case was emphatically a communal, not individual, affair.

### **Oloko Unwa:**

The sixth concept mentioned in the seance therefore, which also needs some explanation, is with regard to Oloko Unwa, 'the law of Unwa'. According to Japan Anyasara, Cultic General Secretary of Orisa who was interviewed on 27th July, 1985, Oloku Unwa was enacted in 1963. This was the year in which no child born in the village of Akaba lived. By the end of that year, the village had buried more than 40 children. This created a great alarm. Hence Unwa, his full name ~~being~~ Chief Samson Wankaraka Uzaka, then the Obeneken of Akaba, with other members of the village council, conducted a special aganaga divination at the 'shrine', ugula of Utoken, 'the communal land deity' in order to find out the cause of the problem. It was discovered to their dismay, that 'sorcerers', igbani ida were responsible. As a result, they decided to enact oloko, 'law', in the presence of every member of the community. On the appointed day, every member of the village assembled at the village square. Unwa in his capacity as the obeneken performed the rite of invocation similar to that performed by Simeon Tinbiri in connection with Ishmael. In the presence of the whole community, Unwa made invocations as follows, after pouring

the necessary libations to inibudu:

All persons who practised witchcraft, ida at Akaba with intent to kill anyone, should die. Any citizen of Akaba who seeks to kill any member of the community, by whatever method, should die. Be it husband against wife; wife against husband; father or mother against children; children against parents, whether Christian or heathen, such person or persons should die. Whoever contravenes the law should be summarily dealt with by Utoken, inibudu, and ipese ede, 'all the things in the land', that is all 'the deities' idiomu, without any delay. This is now 'law', oloko. X

Following this law, devotees of Aruku-egene went with palm wine to its 'shrine', ugula in the forest in order to legalize it spiritually.<sup>32</sup> After that, 8 persons died that year at Akaba for practising witchcraft. Unwa, whose father Ozaka, was one of the most powerful leaders at Akaba, who was appointed obeneken of Akaba in recognition of his father's noble leadership, also died of ida, 'witchcraft' in 1972. Thus he too became a victim of the law he enacted. Hence from 1963, when the law was enacted till this date, oloko Unwa continues to eliminate all who practise ida.

Thus, to people in the community being discussed, such invocations definitely perform certain functions attached to divination. The first of which is the general consensus it generates in the community.<sup>33</sup> Just as the people were in oneness with Unwa when 'oloko Unwa' was enacted in 1963, so were the whole community in oneness with the invocations pronounced by Simeon Tinbiri during Ishmael's divinatory

exercise. The second function is that of the moral concern of divination. It is the view of Forde and Shelton that divination affords the individual the opportunity to take care of transgressions and cures in a more recent social past for which the ancestors exact reparation.<sup>34</sup> In the examples already cited, people who are aware of the enormous consequences of such invocations would probably be afraid to steal. And this leads to the cathartic function of divination mentioned by Gluckman and Turner, in which society is purged and cleansed that way.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Method of Interrogation**

A final point of interest is with regard to the method of interrogation. It should be noted that the person who carried out the invocation was not the same person who carried out the interrogation of Ishmael's aganaga. The first person, Simeon Tinbiri, carried out the first assignment as chief priest of the two most powerful deities in the village and also in the clan, namely, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa. In that capacity, he was the proper person to perform the invocation.

The second person, Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken, who was all the time silent, came on only after the invocation conducted by his superior was over and he maintained the momentum. He is also very versed in the traditions and customs of the village. Having now gained sufficient data of the past from his superior, he now made sure to link the

past with the present so that the calamities in the village will fit properly "into known forms of order, structure and regularity".<sup>36</sup> Here then, the cognitive approach is adopted in which order is well-maintained so that the logic advanced is consistent and objective. This is what is reflected in Horton's cognitive theory on divination<sup>37</sup> and closely followed by Mendonsa.<sup>38</sup>

According to Epie-Atissa culture, the elder speaks first and the junior must listen and wait for the possible moment in which he can appropriately do so. Talmy Givon calls this the first possible "transition relevance space".<sup>39</sup> And when Orderly Torotein did, he reminded Ishmael that his "matter is finished". It was obvious he cannot plan the form of his communication because the situation in which he was participating required more or less continuous monitoring of the movements of the aganaga. Thus when the aganaga touched Asaka, Bill's wife, then Onyema's door and later the laps of Maina, Aziza's wife, the clues were obvious to someone who already knew about these women's misfortunes. Questions were therefore framed in ways in which basic "epistemic attitudes"<sup>40</sup> are applied in order to achieve what was intended. Thus the answers to such questions have to be either 'Yes' or 'No', in a way that tends toward binarity,<sup>41</sup> as in cases of possession divination.<sup>42</sup> Here there was a purpose in this divinatory seance. But when it seemed that the purpose was about to be defeated, Chief Donkimi promptly intervened, thus performing the chairman's role.

### Conclusion

Having seen how aganaga divination is practised at Akaba, as described in this chapter, it should be noted that this is the standard practice hence typical throughout Epie-Atissa. Noteworthy is the fact that as the important type of communal divination which affects human life, it cannot be held in secret only, without also being held in the open for all to see. This enables the whole community to observe and to know why someone was either declared to have practised witchcraft or other related evil practices, or otherwise. This eliminates any accusation of falsehood on the part of the diviners, therefore giving rise to consensus.

Also noteworthy is the fact that a standard procedure is always adopted in aganaga divination in order to arrive at a conclusion. First, the chief priest gives a general introduction of the reason for the divination clearly and unambiguously. The person about whom the divinatory seance is held, is addressed in person by name as if summoned for judgment. Second, the relevant libation is then poured in accordance with the normal tradition. Immediately after this, Ishmael's aganaga was animated and movements began. Since this was in the full view of the whole community, the outcome was therefore beyond any dispute.

According to Turner, in the case of witchcraft, the diviner in Ndembu escaped quickly "after he identified the witch or sorcerer",<sup>43</sup> not only to avoid a dispute that may arise but also the threat of being killed or amputated by the



relatives of the person that has been divined as a sorcerer. This is partly because the diviners may be invited to Ndembu from as far as Angola to whom payment may be made "in clothes, sheep, goats, guns and gun powder".<sup>44</sup> A successful diviner in Angola was therefore considered to be a man of great wealth and influence, and the desire for wealth might influence the way he divines. This situation does not arise in Epie-Atissa, as was seen in the case of Ishmael. The diviners were all natives of the community and devotees or cultic personnel in the shrine of Utoken. Therefore to touch or harrass any such cultic personnel is to declare war on Utoken and all related divinities in the area including the community.

The extent to which aganaga divination is identical to its variation, Ugbolo and how they differ will be seen in the next chapter. The most important function of aganaga divination is that it is mainly a post-mortem divination.

## CHAPTER 1

### FOOTNOTES

1. Robin Horton, 'Ikpatata Dogi: A Kalabari Funeral Rite', African Notes, 5, 3 (1970), pp.57-72.
2. See Wande Abimbola, Ifa, An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus, (Ibadan, 1976).
3. E.J. Alagoa, 'The Western Apoi: Notes on the Use of Ethnographic Data in Historical Reconstruction', African Notes, 5, 1 (1968), pp.12-24.
4. Philip E. Leis, '"Collective Sentiments" as Represented in Ijaw Divination', Journal of the Folklore Institute, 1, 3 (1964), pp.167-179.
5. Robin Horton, op. cit., p.57.
6. Bishop Samuel Crowther, 'Review of the Niger Mission After Twenty One Years in 1878', in Niger CA3/04/747A-C, CMS Nigerian Missions Archival Materials, University of Birmingham (1984).
7. G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion (Berlin: 1977), p.50.
8. Actual documents in connection with the date of the arrival of Christianity to Epie-Atissa, is not yet found. But according to Chief Anthony Otobotekere, surviving first son of Otobotekere, his father was converted at Tombia, a place near Yenagoa in 1911. He was married to a woman at Yenagoa, so he brought Christianity to his wife's home town in 1912. Now Chief Anthony Otobotokere, still a strong member of the Anglican Church, resides at Yenagoa, his maternal home, with his entire family.
9. E.J. Alagoa, op. cit., pp.15-17.
10. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande (Oxford: 1976), pp.7ff, explains how similar seances, defined as an investigation of spiritualistic phenomena, are also carried out in Zandeland "in public and heralded and accompanied by drums". In Epie-Atissa however, seances may be accompanied by drums, and sporadic shootings, of canon and gun, only if the person 'died well', wu-ovie, and in good old age. Victor Turner, Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes Among the Ndembu (Oxford: 1968), also talks of similar examples in Ndembu.
11. Robin Horton, op. cit., pp.58-59.

12. Ibid., p.59.
13. Kay Williamson and A.O. Timitimi, 'A Note on Ifo Number Symbolism', African Notes, 5, 3 (1970), p.9.
14. E.J. Alagoa, op. cit., p.16.
15. Ibid., p.17.
16. Philip E. Leis, op. cit., p.173.
17. 'Unwa's Law', oloko Unwa, has a historical basis for people at the village of Akaba, as a community (see below, pp.78-80).
18. See Philip E. Leis, 'Palm Oil, Illicit Gin, and Moral Order of the Ijaw', American Anthropologist, 66 (1964), p.8328. Here the method of distillation of kaikai, sometimes called, 'illicit gin', is discussed. It was called 'illicit gin' by the colonial administrators in order to distinguish it from Schnapps and whisky or any other kind of gin produced in Europe. In times past, the parent stuff called tombo or 'palm wine' was used. But with the arrival of the white man, Western manufactured hot drinks were introduced as substitutes. But people consider them too expensive. In any case, they are foreign and not all the ancestors in Epie-Atissa are familiar with them. As a result, kaikai which is native to all, has become and will continue to become the main drink during all such purposes. Soft drinks like Fanta orange, Sprite, etc., are augmented during occasions requiring sacrifices.
19. Concepts like 'the things of the village,' ikpese eken; and 'things in the area', ikpese ede, will be treated later, as already indicated.
20. Philip E. Leis, '"Collective Sentiments" as Represented in Ijaw Divination', JFI (1964), p.167.
21. cf. Evans-Pritchard, op. cit., p.229.
22. Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Meyers, Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion; An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural (Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1985), p.381, define ancestor worship as "religious practice involving the worship of the spirits of dead family and lineage members". In Epie-Atissa, it goes beyond the lineage and could sometimes become an affair of the whole community and the entire clan. This practice is known to be widespread in most parts of Africa. Hence Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, The Origins and Development of African Theology (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), p.12, thinks the concept of ancestral spirits constitutes "a major ingredient in African traditional religion and hence in African theology". For other related views, also see Geoffrey Parrinder, African Traditional Religion (London: Sheldon Press, 1962), p.54 ff; E. Bola Idowu, African Traditional Religion (London: SCM Press Ltd; 1973), pp.38ff; I.M. Lewis, Religion in Context,

Cults and Charisma (Cambridge: The University Press, 1986), pp.18ff.

23. Marion Kilson, 'Libation in Ga Ritual', Journal of Religion in Africa (JRA), 2, (1969), p.164.

24. C.M.N. White, 'Witchcraft, Divination and Magic Among the Bolavale Tribes', Africa, Journal of the International African Institute, 18, 2 (1948), p.81.

25. cf. Stephen O. Okafor, 'Bantu Philosophy: Placide Tempels Revisited', JRA, 13, 2 (1982), p.93. Also Clifford Geertz, 'Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example', American Anthropologist, 59 (1957), p.35.

26. cf. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.194.

27. Geoffrey Hurd et al. Human Societies, An Introduction to Sociology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973), p.27.

28. William A. Haviland, Cultural Anthropology (New York: (1987), p.241.

29. The kinship system in Epie-Atissa, especially as portrayed at Akaba during the divinatory seance, is comparable only to what obtains in the Sudan or the Tonga of Zambia, and also among the Nzema and Fante peoples of Ghana, where there is love, sincerity and freedom from deceit. See Geoffrey Hurd, op. cit., p.27; Paul Breidenbach, 'Ritual Interrogation and the Communication of Belief in a West African Religious Movement', JRA, 9 (1978), p.100.

30. According to John Mbiti, the number of times and occasions for which an individual in East and Central Africa may perform invocations, are limitless. The occasions may include, "mealtimes, waking up in the morning, during illness and barrenness" etc. See John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp.72-73. Also Marion Kilson, op. cit., p.164, on similar ideas among the Ga of Southern Ghana.

31. Seibieri-ekine is a deity situated at Opuama, in Oporoma district, in Yenagoa Local Government Area, which is frequently invoked by people in that axis when people want to recover their stolen property. It is frequently invoked because it does not waste time to take action as soon as it is invoked. Thus, the name of the deity alone is enough to strike terror into the heart of any thief, and to cause him to speak the truth.

32. Aruku-egene is the idiomu ikoni, 'deity of war' at Akaba. It is male, and 'land deity', idiomu okumu in contrast to others that are feminine, and live in the water, as idiomu amini, 'water goddess'. These are parallels of oru, 'land divinity', and owu, 'water spirit', of Kalabari, as indicated by G.O.M. Tasie, op. cit., p.10. As a 'deity of war', Aruku-egene wastes no time in killing anyone that

contravenes the law of the land. Hence it cannot be housed or given ugula, 'shrine' in the village, but far away in the bush. By contrast, Orisa is feminine and protective, so it remains with the community in the village.

33. For views on the function of divination in connection with the generation of consensus, see E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande, pp.258-270; M. Jackson, 'An Approach to Kuranko Divination', Human Relations, 31 (1978), pp.117-138; R. Werbner, 'The Superabundance of Understanding: Kalanga Rhetoric and Domestic Divination', American Anthropologist, 75 (1973), pp.1414-1440; Victor Turner, Drums of Affliction, pp.25-51.

34. cf. D. Forde, Yako Studies (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), and A. Shelton, 'The Meaning and Method of Afa Divination among the Northern Nsukka Ibo', American Anthropologist, 67 (1965), pp.1441-1454.

35. cf. M. Gluckman, Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), pp.229-235; V. Turner, 'Chihamba the White Spirit: A Ritual Drama of the Ndembu' (1975), pp.241-242.

36. Renaat Devisch, op. cit., p.62.

37. Robin Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', Africa, 37 (1967), pp.168-172.

38. E. Mendonsa, 'Etiology and Divination among the Sisala of Northern Ghana', JRA, 9 (1978), pp.33-50.

39. Talmy Givon, (ed), Syntax and Semantics, vol. 12. Discourse and Syntax (New York: Academic Press, Inc. (1979), p.75.

40. cf. Ference Kiefer, Questions and Answers (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), pp.15-44.

41. See A. Retel-Laurentin, 'La Force de la Parole', in J. Vernant et. al., Divination et rationalite (Paris: Seuil, 1974). Also A. Bharati, (ed). The Realm of the Extra-Human: Agents and Audiences (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), pp.179-195.

42. cf. Evan M. Zuesse, 'Divination and Deity in African Religions', History of Religions, op. cit., p.163.

43. Victor Turner, Ndembu Divination, Its Symbolism and Techniques (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961, p.51.

44. Ibid., p.50.

## CHAPTER 2

### Descriptive Analysis of Communal Type of Divinatory Practice in Epie-Atissa

#### Ugbolo, 'Staff' Divination - Variation of Aganaga Divination

Having discussed aganaga divination showing what it consists of, with the specific example of a divinatory seance for witchcraft at Akaba, attention will now focus on the variation called ugbolo, 'staff' divination. *The tradition regarding the origin* of the variation was given by reliable informants at Akaba, on 7th February 1986.<sup>1</sup> According to this source, several people in this village and also in other villages in Epie-Atissa maintained and kept their individual family aganaga. But these had to be replaced from time to time, during which people were hired to collect new materials. Cultic adepts were then invited to construct it according to prescribed standards, after which they also 'consecrated', technically called pumu, the finished product. As indicated by Prof. Alagoa, pumu is a Central Delta expression, meaning 'to cleanse' or 'purify'. But when applied to aganaga it is "aimed at removing the effects of any witting errors or acts of defilement during the process of manufacture".<sup>2</sup>

In time this process became expensive and burdensome. Many simply discarded their old family aganaga and failed to replace them. It was later believed that the unceremonious way in which this was done angered the 'ancestors', inibudu, causing them to inflict individual families, and sometimes the entire village with pestilence. The members of Akaba community in particular underwent several calamities, including the one that necessitated the enactment of Oloko Unwa (see above, pp.78-80). In order to save the situation, inquiries were made of Utoken and Aruku-egene when someone called Akidiemugha was chief priest. Details concerning this particular divination are not known since records were not kept; but they were sure that the method used was aganaga. The ancestors, they were told, were angry, as a result of the way aganaga divination has been allowed to go into disrepute. As a result, redressive measures were quickly taken in which 'appeasement sacrifices', locally known as Kun-ikinya, were offered.<sup>3</sup> Divine direction was given after this that only one aganaga be kept for use by the entire village. All available family aganaga were therefore assembled and destroyed after related sacrifices had been offered to inibudu, Orisa and Aruku-egene.

From thenceforth, privately owned aganaga was abolished, and only one aganaga was maintained in the entire village. It was used for both general and specific purposes; that is, for divinatory purposes connected with sickness and other crisis situations, and also death. It was also now centrally kept either in the shrine of Utoken or in the

residence of the chief priest of Utoken, depending on where it was more convenient.

When asked when this took place so as to have the event properly dated, the answer was that it had been long ago. And when it happened, no one knew people would one day be interested in finding out about the specific date, so no records were kept. However, they remembered that a person called Chukuneku, a 'witch-doctor', onye-obu, from Kwale, Bendel State of Nigeria, brought the 'deity', idiomu called Orisa to Akaba about 41 years ago, that was about 1945. It was therefore estimated that the idea of having a single aganaga happened about 10 years later; that was about 1955, just when they were consolidating their position in serious and protracted land cases between them and their two neighbouring villages of Ogu, to their left, and Obogoro, to their right. (See Map 3, for their locations).

This event could be regarded as the event which revolutionized matters connected with aganaga divination both at Akaba where it began and elsewhere in Epie-Atissa, who were also similarly affected by the events. For example, following that decision to locate the central aganaga for the whole village in the shrine of Utoken, it ruled out the possibility of any other shrine having a similar aganaga, for whatever purpose. Therefore after the setting up of Orisa as an important deity in the village, they had to decide on the kind of aganaga that would be kept there. Then they came up with the idea of constructing a



variation of the main aganaga which can be kept in that shrine. Other shrines could also own similar ones. They therefore decided on ugbolo, 'staff', which is borne by two. Since the aganaga is borne by four, the ugbolo therefore has half the strength of aganaga. In this way, everybody including inibudu and all other 'deities', idiomu, was happy. Peace and harmony reigned again especially at Akaba and all other communities that followed this example, and it has been maintained ever since.

With this distinction now made, namely, the village aganaga located in the 'shrine', which is locally called, Ugula of Orisa, their specific functions also became distinct. The aganaga was thenceforth reserved for the specific purpose of post-mortem divination and the ugbolo, for divination regarding misfortunes and calamities, such as sickness, barrenness and other related troubles. So while Utoken took over the specific function of divination about death, Orisa took over the specific function of divination about all other problems except death. This explains why in the course of Ishmael's post-mortem divination seance, Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Orisa performed the invocation, and Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken took over the actual interrogation of the 'dead'. Their roles and the order in which they functioned during that exercise on Tuesday, 24th July, 1985, had been clearly defined by the whole village about 1955. And this is the basis for the consensus exhibited in divination. Hence they do not regard their findings through this method as mere 'collective

sentiments', but as already indicated earlier, as 'empirical evidence'. This is because given this background information, people such as Simeon Tinbiri, Orderly Torotein and others before them who are immersed in such a system would probably refute any notion that they are building their system on the cult of ancestors based on the idea of individual destiny, as indicated by Horton in connection with Tallensi religion.<sup>4</sup> Of course, their refutation may not necessarily invalidate Horton's view because people in Epie-Atissa indeed believe in the relationship between luck, locally called adutomu, and 'destiny', locally called, isini-puluyem. Here, the word adutomu, is a compound word, in which adu, means 'eye', or the 'front', and utomu, means, 'head'. Literarily therefore, adutomu actually means, 'eye of the head'. Those who have bad luck are those whose 'eye of the head', is 'blind', tobuze. In the word, isini-puluyem, it has already been indicated that isini is 'something' or 'thing'; pulu, is 'to ask'; and yem means 'to come with'. Thus the word isini-pulu-yem literarily means, 'that which one asked for while coming'. Hence one reason for people's need of divination in Epie-Atissa is so they could find out if the problem they are facing is caused by 'the blindness of the eye in the head', which could be the handwork of the witch, ida; or it has to do with isini-pulu-yem, 'destiny' or 'that which one asks for while coming'. If this was the case, then they feel it cannot be changed, but could only be endured till death comes. But if it is the former, then avenues to remove or correct the 'blindness' could then be explored.

The concept of destiny is so strong among the Yorubas that the cult of Ifa has devoted a lot towards solving the problem. According to them, predestination is variously called "ayanmo (choice), or ipin (predestined share), or Kadara (divine share man) or ipori (inner head)".<sup>5</sup> Here it is dependent on the 'inner head', ori, or "type of head he chose in heaven."<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of the evolutionary trend occasioned by the variation between aganaga divination and ugbolo divination, one point worth noting was that the various communities independently decide on what material they use in constructing their aganaga or their ugbolo. Generally, this relates only to the type of wood used for the frame.

It will be recalled that discussing aganaga divination, some of the materials used in constructing the frame were considered. These include bamboo, sticks from the plant obelebele and cane ropes. These materials are used on constructing the frame in almost all the villages in Epie clan, including a good number of villages in Atissa clan, for the reasons already given. But in a village like Obogoro, instead of using sticks from obelebele, Tom Ewili, priest of Utoken and other devotees said they use sticks from a tree called ukoru, because it is more durable than obelebele, and it is used for the preparation of hoe-handles. This may be parallel to sticks from a tree called awanran which people from Apoi use for the same

purpose because it is also durable and "used for axe-handles".<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the Oyakiri people of the Central Delta Ijo, may prefer a tree called itobo, which is also durable, and "used for making axe handles".<sup>8</sup> But by contrast, people at Famgbe, one of the most active centres of divination in Atissa area, prefer to use the root of a tree called ebebe, 'umbrella tree' or 'cork wood'. According to Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken, ebebe is preferred to all other trees because it is light and it floats on water. He thinks it is less burdensome on the shoulders of the bearers. In the case of Horton's Ikpataka, red mangrove sticks are used.<sup>9</sup>

**Ugbolo Divination in Orisa Shrine concerning the  
Illness of a Village Chief in the Hospital**

What is about to be described seems to be what may be regarded as a paradoxical situation: people in Epie-Atissa believe in medical science, Christianity and also in African traditional religion, almost indiscriminately. For example, those who profess to be Christians flock to the diviners regularly in order to find out solutions to their problems, and also to know if their deceased family members died well or not. Even those in government-owned general hospitals, while still in admission under proper medical care, send emissaries to find out from the diviners if they will recover. Thus when the church and science fail to satisfy and calm anxieties, diviners succeed. To people in

Epie-Atissa therefore, these are realities; not Western philosophy, as the following example indicates.

An important person in Epie-Atissa, called Chief Macauley Saife, the obeneken, 'village head', of Onopa, with a population of about 922 persons, fell critically ill. He had had primary school education, a good personality, and was known in the area as a fairly prosperous contractor. As a chief, he had five wives, and one of them had previously given birth to twins. Altogether, he had twenty-eight children. He was about 55 years old, and attended the Catholic Church in the neighbouring village called Amarata.

His village Onopa is only two miles away from the main town of Yenagoa, which has a Government General Hospital. These two places are linked by a well-constructed motorable road. He was therefore quickly taken to the hospital and immediately admitted. The paradox was that while the doctors and the nurses battled seriously to save his life, one of his relations was sent secretly to the 'shrine', ugula of Orisa at Akaba on Saturday, 27th July, 1985, in order to find out by means of 'divination', isini-pulem, if he would recover from the illness, and what would be the appropriate treatment for his recovery. Since this relates to the shrine of Orisa, the method of divination was ugbolo, 'staff' divination, a variation of the aganaga, as already indicated. It is therefore necessary to give a brief description of the Ugula of Orisa.

The Ugula of Orisa is enclosed in a little hut built with .



**PLATE 8 - Orisa**, fertility goddess at Akaba being fed with a pipe and a stick of cigarette, probably to indicate the affluence characteristic of this shrine as a major divinatory centre in the Niger Delta.

mud, but roofed with corrugated iron sheets, locally called, ufam-idiomu, meaning, 'house of deity'. It is situated at the centre of the village because it is a protective deity to the whole community. It is therefore harmless and could remain in the village. The harmful ones are usually kept away from the village. For example, Aruku-egene, a counterpart of Orisa, is kept far away in the forest because it is a 'deity of war', idiomu ikoni; therefore dangerous. Inside the ugula is the idiomu called Orisa, represented in a figure made of brown mud. It is a female deity, having two pointed breasts, like those of a young lady, probably indicating fecundity.<sup>10</sup> This impression is enhanced as the figure has a protruding stomach, as though pregnant. The two eyes are represented by two round pieces of glass, probably taken from a broken mirror. A snake-like creature is seen coiling round the body. On the neck is an expensive 'coral bead', ila usually reserved, according to custom, for traditional chiefs and dignitaries, especially during special ceremonial occasions. There are two hands which are bare but a pipe is placed in its mouth, indicating that Orisa is an important idiomu which smokes a pipe full of tobacco. In Epie-Atissa tradition, a pipe portrays affluence and prestige; in some instances, people who smoke pipes and cigarettes are regarded as worldly and frivolous because it is associated with the habit of drunkenness and women. But in this case, it perhaps relates to the concept of affluence.

As indicated in the photograph (see Plate 8), it could be







**PLATE 10** - Ugbolo divination at Akaba, led by Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Orisa and Aruku-egene and another cultic member, in a procession to Orisa shrine.

**PLATE 11** - Johnie Yogoi Obudu, the cultic drummer beats 'the talking drum', eze-som, inviting all the divine forces to Orisa 'shrine', ugula, ready for action.

**PLATE 12** - Women and children seen peeping and straining their necks from outside into Orisa shrine.

seen that one of the devotees is feeding Orisa with a pipe, and the cigarette inside the pipe is burning. In Plate 9, Orisa is flanked by Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene, and acting priest of Orisa, on the left of the Orisa, and Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, the obeneken idiomu, 'Chief of Traditional Affairs' at Akaba, on the right. Again, all these help to emphasize the high regard people at Akaba have for Orisa as their fertility goddess.<sup>11</sup>

The ugbolo, 'staff' used here for 'divination', isini-pulem is about 3 ft long, made of strong and durable wood called uqui, of the family of <sup>the</sup>iroko tree, which is one of the most precious of West African hardwoods and occupies a distinctive place in Ifa poetry.<sup>12</sup> It is also probably of the family of ukoru mentioned earlier in connection with the construction of aganaga frame. The difference is while ukoru is used in preparing hoe-handles, uqui is used in constructing canoes. Both are durable and strong wood. This ugbolo was carried on the left shoulder by two persons, namely, Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene in front, taking the lead, and another worshipper behind him (see Plate 10). They started as a procession from Simeon Tinbiri's block building into the field immediately in front of this building and walked gradually towards Orisa shrine. Mr. Johnie Yogoi Obudu, the drummer who has been in the art for 15 years was asked to beat 'the talking drum', eze-som, inviting all the divine forces to the shrine. (See Plate 11). By the time the procession entered the shrine of Orisa, the drumming and the procession had attracted the



**PLATE 12** - Women and children seen peeping and straining their necks from outside into Orisa shrine.

attention of some women and children who assembled at the entrance of the shrine, but were later dispersed before the divinatory exercise began. This time, it was not meant for the public but only for the 'members' locally called, igbani kene idiomu, 'those who worship the deity', or 'the devotees', and their clients. But somehow, this writer was allowed to stay since they knew he was anxious and interested to see how it is done. Similarly, two other members of his team were permitted to remain in his company. Meanwhile the women and children, equally curious, were briefly allowed to peep in from the sides of the entrance, straining their necks, before being finally dispersed. (See Plate 12). Business then began.

Seated in the shrine to direct enquiries were Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken, and Chief Alfred Donkimi Kimiokrogha, the most experienced and oldest man in the group. Mr. Orderly Torotein took the lead in directing the divinatory enquiry. This is in contrast with the divinatory seance of Ishmael, whose practice of witchcraft threatened the solidarity of the community, therefore Simeon Tinbiri himself initially directed the enquiry. This time, he is not directing, but bearing the ugbolo.

First, Chief Saife's relation was asked to produce the traditional bottle of kaikai which is mandatory in all such enquiries. After the problem has been defined, the actual cost of divining is decided upon later. This traditional bottle of kaikai was quickly produced and then he introduced

the problem, saying:

Our brother Chief Macauley Saife is critically ill in the General Hospital, Yenagoa. I have been sent to consult the oracle of Orisa in order to find out the cause of this illness, and to appeal to Orisa to cure him and restore his life.

Having said this, he swore and vowed that if the chief regained his health, they will bring to Orisa a good present, comprising money, an animal, several drinks such as kaikai and 'palm wine', tombo, including several bottles of soft drinks like coca-cola, sprite, fanta, etc., and whatever additional charges will be made by Orisa. In order to keep the records straight so as to avoid discrepancy during the time of payment, the Secretary, Mr. Japan Anyasara carefully noted down what they had vowed to pay in the shrine's official register. Having done this, the divination exercise began.

It was not long before it was divined that Chief Macauley Saife had a confession to make. Advancing on this, Mr. Orderly Torotein continued to find out what this confession might be.

Priest of Utoken: You have been saying all along that there is something which Chief Macauley Saife must say. He is someone placed in charge of the entire village of Onopa. But he has gone astray in connection with something he said. That is what you have been saying all along.

Ugbolo: In response, the Ugbolo turned to various directions, then made 11 strokes on the ground before Orisa. The interpretation was that the Chief had been to Orisa and also to other places seeking for answers to his problems. He had done something wrong and except care was taken, it was predicted that he might die.

Chief Priest of Aruku-egene: Mr. Simeon Tinbiri, Chief Priest of Aruku-egene then took over to interrogate Orisa.

Nno Orisa, I had earlier said that we cannot glorify ourselves. People came to glorify us. About two or three months ago Chief Macauley Saife's sister came. She came to enquire about the brother who had started seeing certain unfavourable signs. Therefore we enquired of Aruku-egene who confirmed that it would not be long before trouble occurred to Macauley. Hence he was asked to come so all necessary actions would be taken regarding the situation. The sister was informed to convey this to him. Since then all we heard today was that Macauley has fallen ill. That is why we are here to find out why Macauley is sick, so whatever could be done would be done to ensure that he recovers. You have said if care was not taken Macauley would die. If this is because he practised witch-craft or was involved in some dangerous medicine, then he has to pay for it. But if that is not the case, then we would like to be directed in connection with what should be done to save his life. I believe the appropriate sacrifices would be performed.

Having said all these, the Ugbolo swerved from left to right, then made some strange writings on the floor in front of the deity Orisa. The priest of Utoken now took over again to direct the enquiry, to ascertain the cause of illness and possible remedy.

Priest of Utoken: Is it because of what he had said? Too many people are talking ill of him; the whole village is against him. If care is not taken, his hands and feet would die.

Ugbolo: To all this, the Ugbolo continued to answer affirmatively, moving in different directions, and wrote a series of things on the floor in front of Orisa.

Priest of Utoken: Continuing, the priest of Utoken said:

Nno Orisa; Nno Orisa, as a man kept in charge of the entire community; so appointed by men and women, he should do the work with all his heart and with the fear of God. Instead of that he has started to behave like little children by quarrelling with his subjects. In the process, he made certain provocative statements. Now evil men and women, have decided to do him some evil because of his statements, and would put the blame on him.

Again to all these statements, Ugbolo the 'staff' responded in affirmation. But there was the further need to be more specific about the state of his heart. Up to the present moment, they were not sure if Macauley had practised witch-craft or not. It was necessary to establish this fact because if he was involved in it, then there would be no need to continue with the exercise. Therefore, Mr. Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken continued with the interrogation of Ugbolo in order to be more specific.

Nno Orisa, noa, meaning 'Orisa thank you'. You are right in what you have first said. As a matter of fact, it is similar in all respects to the work we are doing here too. It involves occasions when foolishness and wisdom have to be exhibited according to need. A client who gets blessed after coming to you will give you praise; but if he receives bad from you, he would probably pour abuses on you.

But what we want now to know is if he has witch-craft or some bad medicine. Do people want to kill him because of this?

Immediately this question was asked the Ugbolo made a negative response by <sup>a</sup>backward motion. This was indicative of the fact that Chief Macauley Saife definitely did not practise witch-craft. His heart was therefore clean and barring other circumstances he should recover from the illness.

Continuing, the priest of Utoken Akaba said:

You have always said he did not practise witch-craft. It is now certain that he has done something wrong. He will therefore be invited to appear before the shrine of Orisa. When he comes, he would be asked to renounce all the bad things he might have spoken.

Following this statement, a bottle of drink was required from Chief Macauley Saife's relation. The drink was presented and the necessary libations were poured as demanded by custom. The balance of the drink of kaikai was then shared among the worshippers.



As the drink was being shared, the diviners who had the ugbolo on their left shoulders continued to concentrate on their divination. A few more writings were scribbled on the floor in front of Orisa. To the layman's eyes they meant nothing. But to the diviners and especially to the priest of Utoken everything scribbled had some meaning. Having deciphered what it all meant, the priest of Utoken came forth with the interpretation.

Sacrifice: What you are saying is that all being well, Chief Macauley Saife should be fully recovered within 12 days. Otherwise it would be difficult. But what Nno Orisa is saying is that he would do the following things:

1. He will carve an image in the form of a human being;
2. He will provide a male-lizard; and
3. He will provide 7 red candles; with these, he would then repeat all what he had said three times and withdraw them three times. He would then go with all these things to the burial ground at Onopa, and repeat the following statements:

'These are what I, Macauley have brought. There is no other person by the name of Macauley, the Obeneken 'Village Head' of Onopa. I am the only one. Even if the bad people, the witches and wizards have decided to kill me and have Macauley brought to the burial ground, you are implored to leave Macauley and take these instead'.

The human image would be carved from the plantain stem. This will be accompanied with the seven red candles, a male lizard, some drinks and some parched food. These would be offered as sacrifice in the burial ground.

Following this interpretation, the Ugbolo diviners went into further action. As if fully possessed, they moved about in the shrine more vigorously; wrote again on the floor in front of Orisa; they turned round and faced the entrance into the shrine, and standing at the door, they began doing some writings in the air. Again the writings meant nothing to the ordinary onlooker, but they turned around, faced the image of Orisa and there came the interpretation.

Continuing, the Chief Priest of Aruku-egene said:

Nno Orisa, what you have said is that Macauley is our son. We do not want any dirt to affect any of our sons and daughters, wherever they may be. These are people who are taking care of us. Akaba is a small village; without sons like these, no one would take care of us.

There were more writings in the air and on the ground in front of Orisa which became rather difficult for the priests to know exactly what they meant. A few guesses were then made:

"Is it in front of a cloth?" The response was, "No". "A male?" "No". "Wicked people"; again the response was "No!".

Seeing that the diviners were getting somehow mixed up, and not interpreting the signs properly, the Chief priest of Aruku-egene came to their aid. He began by asking them to

hold it; then having gained audience, he went ahead in this manner:

Macauley is the one in charge of the village. This has caused resentments; he is personally involved too. And people who are very close to him are also involved. Some wicked people in the village are involved as well. They are pursuing him on the grounds that he has erred; he has gone wrong in the affairs of the village. Therefore they would want to use that as pretext to undo Macauley. But we disagree with their views. We do not accept.

There was a brief moment of silence as people thought meditatively about the gravity of the situation. Macauley's brother who had come to check from Orisa about the whole situation sat in silence, wondering all along what they must do to save the life of his brother. In that silence, the Chief Priest of Aruku-egene broke the silence by saying:

Four days after today, if he is still alive, let us be happy. The assignment to save his life is big; but let Izibe, 'God' help us!

The bearers of the Ugbolo went into action again. They wrote on the floor, the type of inscriptions that could be read and interpreted by them only. Soon after that, the priest of Utoken provided the interpretation. "There are two persons who are opposing him. The wicked ones are jealous of him".

At this point, it became obvious that they were faced with a serious problem. It was not as easy as they had anticipated; and in order to avoid defeat, the priest of Utoken began to solicit the deities in prayer, which was said thus:

Macauley was appointed Obeneken, 'the village head' of Onopa by the people. Therefore having been appointed by the whole village, if his handwork is good, he remains protected; but if his handwork is evil, he dies the death. Utoken and Izibe should therefore be the judge. Our prayer is that if Macauley practised witch-craft or evil medicine for the purpose of killing people so that he would be alone, with his wives, children and brothers to rule Onopa, then the death is his. But if that is not the case, then all the deities should help, so he could recover.

Taboo Broken: Following this prayer, the bearers of the 'staff' went into further action. They wrote again on the floor and in the air, and made certain signs. People were again poised for the interpretation, which came through the priest of Utoken.

What you are saying now is in connection with sex. He has broken a taboo. As a leader in the community, there are a number of things he is not supposed to do. It is forbidden for a man in his office to do those things. A village head such as he is; he has contravened the law of the land regarding women. He has contravened; he has broken a taboo; he is involved with women, with sex.

To all these, the ugbolo responded positively, and the chief

priest of Aruku-egene added: "People who are wayward do not care, do they?" He was so humorous that it caused all to laugh, thus easing the tension.

Prescriptions for the Problem: The Ugbolo went into action again. It wrote in the air and on the floor, always in front of Orisa. The Ugbolo hit the floor 7 times and made 7 marks like straight lines; it turned around towards the entrance and again towards Orisa. It then nodded several times before standing still for the interpretation.

The chief priest of Aruku-egene began to interpret every movement. He began by saying:

Izibe, once the person's time is up, there is nothing anyone could do about it. Izibe is all powerful; no one could change his sovereignty. But if his time is not up, then deliverance must come from Izibe, 'God'.

There was a pause, as he waited briefly for more illumination about the matter. Then he continued:

There is something mentioned by Orisa. This is in connection with the use of candles. Candles would be provided in two sets; there would be six candles both left and right. These twelve candles would be white in colour, but 7 red ones would be provided together with other things already mentioned, for the purpose of sacrifice at the burial ground. But these 12 candles would not be taken to the burial ground. Rather, they would be taken to the hospital and 3 of them placed at each of the four corners of his bed and completely burnt off. Once this is done, all the evil forces now surrounding him will be dispelled.

Definite instructions were then given as to how these candles should be manipulated before being burnt at the hospital. There should be a short prayer before burning the candles as follows, after taking them round his head:

These candles are being burnt for your sake. Candles produce light which comes from Izibe. All power belongs to Izibe. There is no power greater than Izibe. Nothing will therefore be allowed to remain here to perform evil. These candles have been given the full authority to dispel all evil forces; only good shall prevail.

After these instructions, there was another brief period of activity during which more things were written on the ground and again in the air. Since everything written had been followed with the interpretation, there was a preconditioned moment of silence in readiness for the interpretation. As was expected, the chief priest of Aruku-egene picked up the interpretation.

After the candles in the hospital have been burnt, and the red ones burnt at the burial ground, six other candles would be burnt in his bedroom in his residence. Three candles will be burnt on the head side, and the other three on the leg side.

Having said this, more things were written on the floor in front of Orisa. For the first time, one was able to recognise they included figures such as:

10                      &amp;                      10

0

The interpretation was that more candles would be burnt. They were to burn 6 candles per day for 3 days, making a total of 18 candles. All these must be white in colour.

Transfer of Macauley's sickness to sender: There were a few more writings on the floor and in the air, followed by the interpretation that Macauley's sickness would be transferred to someone else; preferably, to the sender or the one who had caused the problem.

Macauley's brother was then reminded that he was earlier told to carve a human image from a plantain stub. He would now carve two; one to be offered with the sacrificial items and thrown away at the burial ground. The other would be used together with 7 stems of plant locally called okpoto, a tropical plant which grows in parts of the Niger Delta, especially in Epie-Atissa, with tender stems, full of water. It is soft, so people chew the leaves because they are tender and of good taste. The okpoto would be used in flogging the sickness over to the person concerned. The image is representative of Macauley. "He who wants Macauley should have that image. And he who wants Macauley to die of sickness should himself fall ill and die". While doing so, the following statements have to be made:

Who ever has touched Macauley; be it inibudu; be it idiomu, be it witch or wizard that has touched Macauley, all should be told to take their hands off him. Otherwise, you should be sick yourself. You should take Macauley's sickness; no one is barred from the burial ground. Hence he who wants Macauley buried should be buried himself.

Price for the Treatment: There were some more writings again in the air and also on the floor.

After this work has been accomplished, a bottle of kaikai will be given to the elderly people at Onopa. Before drinking the kaikai, the oldest man among them would pour libation and say:

If Macauley is evil and has evil plans, then he would see evil. Otherwise, whoever is after him while he is innocent, such will be afflicted with evil himself.

The chief priest of Aruku-egene who was then leading asked Chief Macauley's relation how much exactly they would pay to Akaba after the Chief had been healed. The answer was that he would bring N10.00 (ten Naira) and 2 chickens for thanks-offering. But this was refused on the grounds that it was too small. After a few more writings on the floor, it was interpreted that Orisa would want the sum of N16.00 (sixteen Naira) and a jar of 'palm wine', tombo. This was further reduced to N12.00 (twelve Naira) and a jar of 'palm wine', tombo.



Is Macauley Dead?: In order to assure Macauley's relation that Macauley was still alive and had not died, the question was put to Orisa to ascertain the true position. It was revealed that Macauley had not died so his relation needed not to panic. The enquiry went like this:

Chief Priest of Aruku-egene: "Nno Orisa, we have had this stranger all day. He is afraid that Macauley may be dead. Is Macauley dead?"

Orisa: This was denied by Orisa through the ugbolo by a backward movement indicating, "no!"

Chief Priest: "You are denying the fact. Macauley has not died. The brother keeps on sneezing here; perhaps he has died and he is being wanted at home."

Orisa: There was a backward movement indicating, "No."  
"Macauley is not dead. He is still alive."

Chief Priest: "You have seen it. We are only afraid because we do not want to have a situation of shame, to be suddenly told Macauley is dead. We do not want any shame."

The priest of Utoken also added to this enquiry and pleaded with the deities to help:

Nno Orisa, we have a stranger who wants to speak to the entire village. Our person is sick so we implore you all to go to help in curing him. All the deities at Akaba are implored to go together to see that he is healed. If our son gets well, we shall drink tomorrow.

Chief Macauley Saife's brother was then asked to put down a bottle of kaikai because there was no more trouble.

Further Directives: The Bible and The Cross: There were further writings on the floor and further instructions were given as follows:

He should buy a Bible, and go to pray with it in the burial ground. It would have to be a new Bible. He would pray with it, asking Izibe to forgive all his sins. He would open the Bible in the burial ground and confess all his sins, that Izibe should forgive him of all the sins he has committed. He should also be forgiven of all the sins others have committed in his name. The Bible should then be taken home and put under his pillow.

After these directives, statements were made by the chief priest of Aruku-egene in connection with the invocation of Macauley's osiyo, 'soul', to return. He said he had always done so for others; he would therefore ensure that Macauley's osiyo would be invoked to return, wherever it may have gone.

There were a few more writings on the floor, and the chief priest of Aruku-egene sneezed. Someone whispered that this

was a bad omen, but it was ignored. Then the chief priest continued by threatening those two persons who, as revealed, were responsible for Macauley's present situation. "Once Macauley recovers", he said "leave them, the two persons who have been troubling Macauley with the deities. They would deal adequately with them."

The priest of Utoken, Mr. Orderly Torotein criticised him for wishing to take upon himself an assignment about which he was not directed. Then he made his personal address to Orisa with a pledge, saying:

Nno Orisa; I thank you very much. Indeed should Macauley recover, the day on which Orugbani, his brother comes to pay his dues, I shall personally bring a jar of palm wine and three bottles of kaikai. I shall walk round the village of Akabà from one end to the other with these drinks as my personal expression of appreciation. I would do this because it would be awful to hear of Macauley's death. Therefore the jar of palm wine would be taken to Aruku-egene in the bush, but the three bottles of kaikai would be for the village. Thus, before his brother Orugbani departs from here, we implore you to go to the hospital and begin the cure. Let him respond to treatment, let every tablet he takes be effective. We know of no better doctor nor better medicine.

After this, the diviners, the bearers of ugbolo began to divine again. There were a few more writings on the floor followed by a period of interpretation, led by the priest of Utoken, thus:

The priest: "People who are wicked in heart have donated him to their cult. They want to kill him."

Ugbolo: A continuous nod was made of ugbolo to affirm that the statement was correct.

The Priest: "They have done him something bad. They have inflicted on him some bodily injuries. That is why he is sick, very sick."

Ugbolo: The ugbolo nodded continuously and positively then began writing again on the floor.

The priest paused for a moment, looked around and asked one of their colleagues to go for some cigarettes. Like a medical doctor handling a serious and complicated case, he became a little uneasy, and began blaming one of their colleagues for sleeping on duty. Apparently some of them were getting tired because the whole exercise began ~~about~~ 10 a.m. and it was then about 5 p.m. In order to keep him awake, he therefore sent someone out in order to buy some cigarettes.

When the divination exercise resumed following this brief pause, the revelation came that the enemies have planted something evil in the residence of Macauley. Since he had two houses of his own, one a block building and the other one of mud, it was necessary to ascertain in which of these buildings the enemies had planted the evil medicine or

charm. The priest of Utoken therefore led another moment of enquiries so Orisa might direct them.

The Priest: "Nno Orisa, there are two houses; did they plant the evil medicine in both houses?"

Ugbolo: "No."

Priest: "Only in one?"

Ugbolo: "Yes."

Priest: "Is it in the block building, the one near the waterside?"

Ugbolo: "Yes."

Then those who are acquainted with the regular activities in that place testified to the fact that that house was used like a town hall. That was where people assembled regularly to have some drinks and hold their meetings with the village head. People like it because it is a new building. The interrogation then continued, with the chief priest of Aruku-egene leading.

Chief Priest: "They have put the hat on him. But some are in disagreement, the wicked ones. They do not like it; even if they did, it was by mere pretence; not from the heart."

Ugbolo: The ugbolo nodded affirmatively again and began writing, scribbling several things on the floor. The chief priest of Aruku-egene, Mr. Simeon Tinbiri interpreted saying:

"He should buy a cross, the white man's cross, and hang it at the entrance to the main door, the door leading to the parlour where people assemble regularly to drink and chat."

There were more writings on the floor and for the interpretation, the chief priest confessed that he was only an interpreter to ugbolo and Orisa:

Is that what you are saying? You are the one saying it. All I do is to interpret. I do not know anything. Whatever ugbolo and Orisa say, that is what I interpret. My duty is to interpret. I am therefore simply an interpreter.

Then there was a pause, after which he continued:

After his recovery, and once he arrives home, and before he settles down, he should take 30 kobo [which is the equivalent of 3 shillings]; with that money, he should circle his feet and throw them on the ground at Onopa.

This instruction was brief and without any detailed explanation. It sounded parabolic so the question was asked what that meant, but without any reply. It probably had to do with the concept of covenant relationship. The action might be symbolic of his having to renew his covenant relationship with the land of which he is the head.

Following this, the ugbolo wrote again on the floor, and it was interpreted that Macauley was blessed with children. The children would therefore be protected against the evil

one. But they acknowledged the fact that the assignment before them was formidable and enormous. This confession by the priest of Utoken probably frightened Orugbani, Macauley's brother, who pleaded that he may not be able to complete the assignments as directed. He therefore asked that the priests of Orisa, Utoken and Aruku-egene should perform them themselves. This was agreed and the priest of Utoken was asked to take it up, with effect from the next day, 28 July, 1985. Drinks were then served, since the matter had been completed.

#### **A Brief Analysis**

A specific procedure was also adopted in ugbolo divination in connection with Chief Macauley Saife's illness. First, the divinities were reminded that Macauley Saife was sick. He should be allowed to die if he practised witchcraft or other related evil medicines. If he had broken some taboos against inibudu, for which the evil forces were against him, then he needed to confess before Orisa who ~~would~~ then intercede for him before the other deities. The arguments, according to Orderly Torotein, chief priest of Utoken, for the person who dies practising witchcraft are different from those of the person who merely is sick. In the first case, he deserves to die because witches and wizards ~~should~~ not be spared. In this case, even the kinship aspect is ignored. But in the second case, if the sick person was ignorant of witchcraft and related practices in evil medicine, then it

becomes necessary to plead with the divinities to spare his life. Even then, that may not be enough reason for the divinities to relent because it is the duty of the deity called Utoken to ensure that society is kept together, by ridding it of people who practice both mortal sins and venial sins, such as witchcraft, jealousy, envy, greed, pride, anger, stealing, lust, adulterous tendencies, incest, etc. These are faults that could break any society.

Another aspect worth noting with regard to aganaga and ugbolo divinatory practices portrayed in the two instances described at Akaba is in connection with the language of divination. Normally, a growing child acquires a language through socialization, a process which enables the child to internalize the "standards of good and bad, right and wrong",<sup>13</sup> hence the norms and values of that society. But in divination in Epie-Atissa, the diviners learn the art after their call and initiation. As in the case of the Urhobo, the diviner is regarded as an expert in divination, who must be "able through the system to communicate with the unseen and supersensible world, and transmit messages from ancestors, spirits and divinities to his clients."<sup>14</sup> While among the Yoruba and Urhobo, the diviner will have to learn the language of manipulating the divining chain,<sup>15</sup> in Epie-Atissa, he learns the language of manipulating the aganaga and the ugbolo. He therefore learns a new language, the language of signs and symbols. According to Victor Turner, the Ndembu make use of symbols in order to "bring into the open what is hidden and unknown."<sup>16</sup> Only the



cult-adepts are capable of handling these symbols, because "it is said that the spirit, when it is afflicting its victim, is concealed in his or her body."<sup>17</sup> Diviners are therefore capable of representing such spirits symbolically, and be able to extract it from the victim and then reconcile such spirits with those to which they belong.

It should be recalled that similar symbolic forms were prescribed in the shrine of Orisa during the divinatory exercise for chief Macauley Saife. The prescription was that Macauley's brother was to carve two human images from the plantain stub. The purpose was to transfer Macauley's sickness to the sender; so one of the images symbolized the chief who was sick; the other one symbolized the sender. The image that symbolized the sender was to be offered with sacrifices and thrown away at the burial ground, but the image that symbolized Macauley was to be flogged with a plant called okpoto, thus flogging away the sickness to the sender (see above, pp.112-113). All these were interpreted from the various signs made in the air and hieroglyphics written on the floor of Orisa shrine with the ugbolo. Similar signs and hieroglyphics were also interpreted during the post-mortem divination for witchcraft. They were not always easy to interpret, so questions demanding 'yes' or 'no' answers were therefore asked in order to settle the discrepancies. At a point, the chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa, Simeon Tinbiri agreed that he was only an interpreter to ugbolo and Orisa, who interpreted whatever they said (see above. p.119). Ugbolo divination could

therefore be classified under interpretative divination.<sup>18</sup>

Other symbolisms peculiar to divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa which are mentioned in connection with Chief Macauley Saife's ugbolo divination, besides the two images from the plantain stubs include, 'a lizard' known in Epie language as ogeregere, candles of various colours, a new Bible and 'the white man's cross'. The 'lizard', ogeregere, was to be male, therefore symbolic of the chief who was sick. It was to be offered with 'parched food', idiomu-vurem, in which idiomu means 'food', and vurem means 'that which is not cooked but roasted', hence 'parched'. These were to be offered at the burial ground at Onopa, his village, in which the 'lizard', ogeregere was to be allowed to wander away as scape-goat. The fact that this is symbolic of the sick man's soul is confirmed by J.G. Frazer in a story he narrates concerning the belief of the Santals thus:

The Santals tell how a man fell asleep, and growing very thirsty, his soul in the form of a lizard, left his body, and entered a pitcher of water to drink. Just then the owner of the pitcher happened to cover it; so the soul could not return to the body and the man died. While his friends were preparing to burn the body someone uncovered the pitcher to get the water. The lizard escaped and returned to the body, which immediately revived; so the man rose up and asked his friends why they were weeping. They told him they thought he was dead and were about to burn his body. He said he had been down a well to get water, but had found it hard to get out and had just returned. So they saw it all.<sup>19</sup>

Although there are no known folktales and legends in

Epie-Atissa in connection with the lizard similar to this, the fact remains that this story underpins a parallel belief in Epie-Atissa about the soul, locally called osio. It is believed that the osio is usually captured by 'witchcraft', ida, and unless quickly dealt with, the person dies. It is believed in Epie-Atissa that when a man is asleep, the osio often escapes and wanders about. As a result, little children are carefully instructed not to wake their parents whenever they are asleep. The osio must be allowed to return, less they fall sick and die. Thus, the diviners at Orisa thought Saife's 'soul', osio was imprisoned somewhere and the lizard could therefore be given in exchange. Charles Winick calls this aversive magic, which he defines as "popular magic geared toward avoiding trouble, as in the scape-goat ritual."<sup>20</sup> But to the diviners in Epie-Atissa, it is not magic but reality, hence symbolic.<sup>21</sup>

Other items such as candles were symbolic of light, which represents life. Sickness and death are symbolic of darkness. Burning candles around his sick bed were intended to dispel death and restore life. The white man's cross was symbolic of power, which was capable of repelling evil forces. This was the reason for the prescription that it be hanged on the door posts leading to the sitting room. The cross as a Christian symbol could be traced historically back to the time when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. It soon became a symbol of power, which according to Cirlot, "affirms the primary relationship between the two worlds of the celestial and the

earthly."<sup>22</sup> Now it has become a symbol for the Christians and pagans alike.<sup>23</sup> But, while to the Christians, the cross is a symbol of their faith, to the pagans, it is either an ordinary ornament or an amulet.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the Bible was used, in this case, as one would use an amulet. Also important is the concept of omens, locally called isini-kanna, in the form of 'sneezing', udisan, which occurred twice, an aspect that is common among diviners.<sup>25</sup>

**Ugbolo Divination in Orisa's Shrine concerning a  
Woman suffering from Earache**

After the seance in Orisa shrine in connection with Chief Macauley Saife, Obeneken of Onopa, just discussed, another seance took place in connection with a woman suffering from earache, on the same day, Saturday, 27 July, 1985, at about 5.15 pm. Her name is Mammy Ogbolo, whose husband, Mr. Ogbolo Tinbiri, priest of a deity called beni-kurukuru, a personal deity, was one of the persons who carried the aganaga concerning Ishmael, and stood on the right, in front. They have two children. Mammy is therefore priestess of beni-kurukuru. She is middle-aged and practices subsistence farming. She had accompanied another woman who wanted to pay her vows because her son who was very sick only a few days earlier, had recovered. When the child was sick, she brought him to Orisa, and made promises. He had fully recovered, so she had come joyfully to pay.

During this, Mammy sat quietly, waiting her turn to



**PLATE 13** - Mammy Ogbolo and her friend with child waiting for their turn at Orisa shrine.



**PLATE 14** - Ugboro divination for earache is pinned down motionless in front of Mammy Ogbolo.

explain her problem (see Plate 13).

The lady explained that she had earache and wanted to find out what might be the cause. She reported that the earache started from the left ear, but it was also affecting the right ear. She was afraid she might become deaf because the ear drums were making some sounds. She paid the usual requirement of a bottle of kaikai, and after it had been served, the diviners went into action.

The Ugbolo was once again borne by Simeon Tinbiri and his colleague who performed the previous one. Soon after they had carried it, the Ugbolo turned them round and finally came down in front of the woman. There they remained pinned to the ground in front of the woman, almost motionless (see Plate 14). While everybody watched in silence, they began writing a few things on the floor, following which the chief priest of Aruku-egene gave the interpretation. Again, the seance will be presented exactly as it was performed, so as to give it the proper picture.

Chief Priest: "You have a confession to make. You better make it now."

The Lady: "My own, what I know to tell everybody here...." (She became shy and held back.)

Chief Priest: "Your idiomu has slapped you by the ear."

The Lady: Panic, stricken, the lady begged for attention and said she had something to say. Proceeding she said, "I

have something to say. What I have done is what I shall confess" Having said this, she adjusted herself ready for the worst. Then she continued:

I have a farm somewhere in the bush which I started last year. I went to clear it some time ago this year, and decided to burn the heap of grass and pieces of woods and sticks that had piled up. While the pile was still burning, Fatima, my partner, called my attention to something I had not noticed. At a closer look, I found that I was burning the heap which was on top of Owu-azi, 'ant hill'. I had mistakenly piled up this heap on top of Owu-azi and not being aware of it, set fire on it.

At this stage, she looked so frightened and sick, so much so that she was told to relax and continue gently with her statement. She then relaxed, took a short breath and continued.

I asked to know from my partner whether what we were seeing was not ordinary mud. She said it was not, so I took a stick, raised up the burning head to make sure. Surprisingly, I discovered that it was indeed Owu-azi, 'ant hill', (the type which looks like a human being, wearing a hat). Having seen this, I shouted and said, 'I did not do it intentionally; I did not see you. I am sorry.

Here again, the woman looked very pale and frightened. It was as though she had done something that was most abominable; burning Owu-azi, 'ant hill'. Her eyes were all red with fright and she demonstrated how seriously repentant she was for committing that crime against her idiomu.

Proceeding, she said:

I immediately went to a nearby stream and collected some fresh water which was poured on the Owu-azi. This was done several times in order to be sure that the Owu-azi had cooled down properly. Then when I returned home, I did not think very seriously about the incident because it was accidental and not intentional. I therefore thought I would be forgiven. But from the day I went there to collect some plantains till today, I have been sick. As a result, I have not been able to go anywhere for a whole week now. I have lost appetite because I do not feel hungry at all. That is what I have done.

Chief Priest: Having finished, she was queried by the chief priest for failing to go with some drinks long before this time.

You know what you have done. This is something which pertains to you which you have spoilt. Can't you take some drinks there to sue for peace? You should have done that and with the drink pleaded with idiomu for pardon. Why have you not done that? Now you come to say you're sick.

The Lady: The lady responded by saying:

Somehow I have not been able to do so. I cannot deny what I have done or not been able to do. My ear is making noise like a drum. The noise was in one side of the ear; now it is in both ears. Please tell me what to do in order that I might regain the full use of my ears. I do not want to become deaf; I was not born deaf. I shall die if I become deaf.

Chief Priest: There were a few writings with the ugbolo as usual. Then it was interpreted that she was to go to the farm with some people.



You will go with some people to the farm who will pray over the land and the Owu-azi, 'ant hill'. Each of them will pray asking for forgiveness for you. You will then offer some sacrifices on the spot. When you come home, make sure to collect salt water from the sea, and put it in your ears.

The Lady: What things would I use for the sacrifice?

Chief Priest: You do not know! You will take some drinks, snuff, seven fingers of banana, and a few people to the farm. You will then apologise, ask for pardon and say your earache be taken away. 'Remove your hand and let my both ears be opened.' When you come home, mix some chalk with salt water from the sea and rub your ears. That will be all.

Permission to Depart from Orisa:

Having accomplished the day's work which had lasted from 10 a.m. through 6 p.m., all who had participated in the exercise were tired and exhausted. But no one could depart without permission from Orisa. So the chief priest of Aruku-egene sought for the permission, advancing cogent reasons in support.

Chief Priest: Nno Orisa, there is nothing else. Night is approaching. I have not taken my seat at home since morning. We have been here all day because of these visitors. I have eaten nothing all day. I am now hungry and would want to go home. Could you go down from our shoulders so I could go to my house?

Orisa: Orisa refused because work was not complete yet.

There were some pending matters which were yet to be

handled. Permission to depart was therefore denied.

Ugbolo: The Ugbolo diviners therefore went back into action to find out what the pending matter was. As a result, there were further writings on the floor before Orisa, after which the Ugbolo moved and touched a woman carrying a little boy of about one year old who was sitting on the lap of his mother.

Chief Priest: The chief priest began to interpret. This is the boy who was sick yesterday and was rushed here to Orisa. The mother has come with the boy in order to give thanks.

There were a few more writings and the interpretation was not coming fast enough. The priest of Utoken therefore urged that things should be speeded up since time was going. The priest of Utoken took up the interpretation.

Priest of Utoken: Addressing the child's mother who testified that the child was now well, he asked her to produce a bottle of kaikai for all to drink as a token of appreciation. This she did without any delay.

While they thought it was time to come down, the chief priest began to say, it was time.

Chief Priest: "It is time to come down; it is time."

Husband and Wife Relationship: Just then the Ugbolo moved and touched a couple who were among the worshippers, thus indicating that there was something to be said about them. This surprised the priest of Utoken.

Priest of Utoken: Nno Orisa, we have visitors here. You have a word for the husband and wife because they have spoken things against themselves. But in view of all the visitors here, some of those confidential matters could be left for another day. Such should not be exposed in public because they concern husband and wife. Domestic matters in connection with husband and wife relationship should not be dealt with in the presence of our visitors. In fact one of the visitors is a relation of the woman concerned. It is like reporting family squabbles to a brother-in-law who is here for something different.

There were some more writings and the interpretation was that permission for dismissal has been granted! The whole episode therefore ended at 6.15 p.m.

### Analysis

In this episode, the woman indicated through her confessional statement, that she had inadvertently set fire on 'an ant-hill', locally called owu-azi. The question which arises is, how important is owu-azi, or what is its significance? It would be observed that owu-azi is a compound word. Etymologically, the word owu is a Kalabari word for 'water spirit', as against oru, 'land deity or divinity'.<sup>26</sup> The Epie-Atissa word for owu, is idiomu-amini; and for oru is idiomu-azi. It would therefore mean, by implication that owu-azi and idiomu-azi have the same meaning of, 'land deity'. In other words, while owu-azi has the English translation of 'ant-hill', in Epie-Atissa, it could also have the extended meaning of 'land deity'. Hence to Mrs. Mammy Ogbolo, owu-azi is not 'an ant-hill', but 'deity'. Thus it is taboo for a devotee to set fire on his or her 'divinity', idiomu. The consequence was that she was 'slapped' in the ear by this deity which could probably be her personal deity. She therefore knew the cause of her earache, which was gradually deteriorating to the level of deafness, for which she needed a speedy remedy.

Three things were suggested for the remedy. First, she was to go to the farm with some people, apparently devotees of Orisa cult, who will intercede in prayer for her forgiveness. This stipulates one of the functions of the priesthood; that of mediating "between the divinity and the

people".<sup>27</sup> Secondly, a sacrifice which would be regarded as 'peace-offering' was to be offered, comprising some drinks, snuff and 7 fingers of banana, in a redressive ritual, all of which reinforce cultural values. For example, it is customary in Epie-Atissa to go with drinks when suing for peace. Drinks gladden the heart and make things easy for reconciliation.

The snuff, locally called ibi-som, meaning 'medicine that is taken', is powdered tobacco taken by sniffing up the nostrils. Since it is tobacco, snuff may perform a similar function to that of cigarettes. It would be recalled that while still in the process of Chief Macauley Saife's seance, some of the cultic officials began sleeping on duty. That angered Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene, who therefore ordered some cigarettes so that people will keep awake. (See above, p.117). In that respect, it could be said that smoking is a means of inducing a state of ecstasy. According to Frazer, some priests in Uganda smoke tobacco in pipes, until they get fiercely inspired by their god, till they get to the point of frenzy.<sup>28</sup> The Yanomamo, on the other hand, get addicted to tobacco, and instead of smoking it, or taking it as snuff, they wrap "fine string around them to hold them together and stick them between their lower teeth and gums and suck them contentedly."<sup>29</sup> Thus among the Yanomamo, every person, "men, women and children chew tobacco and all are addicted to it."<sup>30</sup>

To people in such cultures, what is food for them will also

be served as food to their gods. That explains why bananas are also included in the sacrifice. People in Epie-Atissa eat banana as much as they eat plantain. It is significant that 7 fingers were recommended because most of the Ijo communities in the Niger Delta believe that "seven is always regarded as a forbidden number, reserved for the divinities."<sup>31</sup>

Thirdly, the woman with the earache problem was asked to mix chalk with water from the sea and rub her ears. The Epie-Atissa name for chalk is utiin; while among the Kolokuma Ijo, it is called toru. The Ibos call it nzu. In all these cases the reference is 'the native chalk' which is prepared specifically for use in the cultic shrines. Thus among the Ibos, chalk is one of the most important implements used in worship, and "the priests and sometimes the worshippers powder the eyelids and toes to show that they are in the safe protection of the spirits."<sup>32</sup> Most people in Epie-Atissa believe that 'chalk', utiin, is one of the most favourable diets of 'water deities', idiomu-amini, especially 'python, odum. 'Salt water', amini ubonu, with which utiin is associated here is also significant because it would remind Mammy Ogbolo of the abode of idiomu amini, or more specifically, what is generally known as 'mermaid'.

Thus, a mixture of 'chalk', utiin, with 'salt water,' amini-ubonu, for the treatment of earache would probably be more appreciated by a devotee such as Mammy Ogbolo, in the circumstances, than tablets or injections prescribed by the

physician in the hospital. Unlike the case of Macauley Saife, therefore, she carefully avoided the hospital because she has more faith in Orisa's treatment than that of the hospital.

In this particular divinatory seance, it could be suggested that divination fulfills a psychological function because Mammy Ogbolo was probably sick because of psychological reasons. But she quickly recovered after her confession and treatment. But Chief Macauley who failed to appear before Orisa for a similar confession and treatment, probably died of basic psychological reasons.<sup>33</sup>

#### The Coming of Orisa to Akaba - An Historical Account

Having now seen two important occasions in which Ugbolo divination was carried out in Orisa shrine at Akaba, thus showing the variation between aganaga divination and Ugbolo divination, it is also necessary to explain historically how Orisa as a deity came to Akaba. Again, the main informants who were interviewed on 7th February, 1986, were Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, Simeon Tinbiri, Orderly Torotein, and Japan Anyasara, the cultic secretary. The presence of Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha was very remarkable because as the oldest person in the village and the obeneken idiomu kenem, 'the village head in relation to the worship of divinities', his views in traditional matters are highly respected and sometimes regarded as final. He is the link between the old

and the new. Thus Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa, and Orderly Torotein, chief priest of Utoken, both depend on him to give them the necessary leadership and tutorials concerning the service of the divinities. But his son, a young schoolmaster, is the obeneken, 'village head' of Akaba.

Explaining how Orisa came to Akaba, Chief Donkimi gave two reasons. First, there was a time when Akaba as a community was faced with a high mortality rate of children. The situation gradually worsened to the extent that everybody, especially pregnant women and nursing mothers continued to live in fear. It was in order to arrest this situation that oloko Unwa, 'the law of Unwa' was enacted (see above, pp.78-80). Secondly, Akaba as a village had serious land disputes with their two neighbouring villages called Ogu to the West, and Obogoro to the East. The circumstances were that several years after Akaba had settled down and had remained in her present location, the people of Ogu decided to lay claim to the ownership of the land. They maintained that the land on which Akaba had settled was theirs, therefore Akaba should relinquish it. But Akaba refused and decided to contest it.<sup>34</sup> Land locked between Ogu and Obogoro, ~~both of which claimed~~ ownership of the land, Akaba had to put up a serious resistance, and therefore fought with vigour for survival, or be eliminated. In the process many of those who led Akaba during those disputes died prematurely. This, added to the corresponding high mortality rate of children, created an alarm, and hence, an



urgent need for help.

It was at this time that a man named Chukuneku, 'a witch doctor', onyo-obu, from a place called Kwale, in Bendel State of Nigeria, was invited to Akaba to help. There were four main leaders who died prematurely during this period, which caused great concern. They were Ozaka, Tinbiri, Ugbomo and Agi. It was after these people that Chief Samson Wankaraka, commonly known as Unwa, took over and led Akaba during the remaining period of court cases, and also instituted oloko Unwa, 'Unwa's law', already discussed. Unwa was the son of Ozaka, who was one of the most powerful leaders at Akaba. The main function of this idionu was to protect the entire community against the diabolical plans of her enemies, especially in the two villages of Ogu and Obogoro. Chukuneku had promised that with Orisa in their midst, the enemies of Akaba would no longer succeed to kill all their children and leaders. This was a welcome relief. Since Chukuneku spoke Ibo, he gave the name Orisa or Olisa, which is often regarded as the Ibo variant to a deity in Akaba, in Epie-Atissa. The words Orisa or Olisa are words which the Ibos translate to mean, 'god'. But Orisa is more of a Yoruba<sup>35</sup> than <sup>an</sup> Ibo title. The Yorubas regard Orisa, which means, 'divinities', as the functionaries of 'God', Olorun.<sup>36</sup> The name Chukuneku, is however Ibo, meaning, 'God is speaking'. In other words, he came to Akaba at a time they needed God most and spoke to them as one sent from Chuku, 'God'.

Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha emphasized, to the approval of all, that from the moment of the arrival of Orisa, the village of Akaba won all the series of land cases which were decided in the law courts between them and their hostile neighbours. Their leaders also stopped dying prematurely, except when caused by their own involvement in witchcraft, as in the case of Unwa. The mortality rate of children also stabilized. These results and the relative peace they enjoyed convinced the people of Akaba that Orisa was a 'true deity', or idiomu tonmu. Since records were not kept, it was not possible for them to pinpoint the exact date when Orisa came to Akaba. But they thought the events narrated occurred about 41 years ago. Therefore it was estimated that Orisa became a cult at Akaba about 1945.

Orisa is therefore <sup>the</sup> idiomu worshipped by everybody at Akaba. The chief priest was someone called Meshack Akpaigbe, but after a while, he declined his position, because he was continually overwhelmed by several problems. As a result, a new chief priest has not been appointed. But Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene, also performs the function of chief priest of Orisa, in an acting capacity.<sup>37</sup> This has been since 1975.

Aruku-egene, also a related cult, was brought to Akaba many years before Orisa, as idiomu ikonu, meaning, 'deity; of warfare'. Those were days of incessant inter-village and inter-tribal warfares.

Someone called Egelejugu was the first chief priest who consulted with Aruku-egene before Akaba went to war. Thus the outcome of the war was already determined, as in the case of the Delphic Oracle<sup>38</sup> before they ever embarked upon it. Following the consultation, Aruku-egene determined those who would go to war, and such persons were tabooed from having sexual relations, or having anything to do with a woman in her menstrual period. Otherwise, it was certain such a person would die in battle and would not return alive. Simeon Tinbiri is now the sixth chief priest of Aruku-egene, after Egelejugu, Egba, Alafawari, Aginigani, and Akidiemugha. But while Aruku-egene has its ugula, 'shrine', in the forest, away from the women and the uninitiated, Orisa has its ugula in the centre of Akaba. Hence it is the idiomu which all, irrespective of sex or age, may consult.

#### **Ugbolo Divination: The Recession of High Flood at Swali**

Another occasion in which Ugbolo divination was used was in connection with the recession of high flood. Villages situated in the Niger Delta experience floods year after year, especially during the rainy seasons. The rain begins in late April; gets to the peak in June and July, during which the River Niger overflows its banks, thus causing flood. In some years the flood could be very high and hence destructive to crops, and sometimes whole villages are swept away in the process. Other years may be only moderate.

But whichever is the case, some of these villages will consult with their deities, idiomu by way of Ugbolo divination, committing the whole village into the hands of idiomu. This is in order that the lives of people in the village, men, women and children, including property, will also be protected. Otherwise, there ~~would be~~ cases where not only food, houses and lives of people will be lost, but also the entire village ~~would be~~ completely submerged into oblivion. In such circumstances, it is believed that idiomu were displeased because the chief priests and their worshippers <sup>have</sup> failed to perform their duties in the proper manner. They are supposed to come with presents before the floods rise, asking for protection. Then when they recede, the people must show their appreciation by doing what is customary. Otherwise, idiomu might be provoked to anger, and that could be disastrous.

Thus, on Tuesday, October 22, 1985, having heard that a village called Swali, was about to perform a seance in connection with the receding flood, this writer with two other companions, also went.

Swali is a little village near Yenagoa Main Town with an estimated population of 575 people. The predominant deity here is Utoken 'land of the village'. Following an earlier appointment, the priest of Utoken, Mr. Marcus Obi, assembled others such as Mr. Bibitarigha Uko and his assistant who are the bearers of the Ugbolo, chief Egedegu Ekpeku, the oldest



**PLATE 15** - Ugbolo divination at Swali showing women devotees outside the shrine.



**PLATE 16** - Women devotees attending to ugbolo divination at Swali outside the shrine.

man in the village, Mr. Okoro Okpogia, priest of a deity called Egbe, and all the other worshippers, both men and women. The women assembled outside the shrine, the men sat inside (see Plates 15 and 16; note the woman standing outside the shrine).

At first they wondered what this research was all about. They would not proceed any further ~~unless~~ things were explained to their satisfaction. After this was done, this writer and his two other companions were asked to leave the shrine momentarily so they could hold their consultation first. They wanted first of all to agree among themselves if they should proceed and allow their shrines and important images to be photographed, or even respond to any questions asked since it would mean revealing and making public all that had been a secret from time immemorial. One of the older women in the village had already openly expressed her resentment and wondered if it was not intended for evil. "Do they want to know our secrets so in case of war they would easily annihilate us?" she asked, and warned her husband, Chief Egedegu Ekpeku to be careful.

In spite of all this initial alarm, they conferred and finally agreed to go ahead with the exercise. They therefore requested that two bottles of kaikai, 'locally brewed alcoholic drink', be produced in fulfillment of the traditional norm. Having produced the drinks, Mr. Bibitarigha Uko was asked to introduce the matter. With a bottle of drink in one hand and a little drinking glass in

the other, he knelt at the foot of the cotton tree, which is the symbol of Utoken and said:

Ekpe (which is the name of one of the deities), Sunday has brought this drink. He said he is very delighted to come and see us all worshipping in the shrine. He has therefore brought two bottles of drink for us to drink. He would want us to tell him about everything. When he gets there, if any good thing comes out of it, we are in it also. This is the drink brought by Sunday; that is all.

Having said this, a glass of drink was given to Chief Egedegu Ekpeku who sat on the right hand of the shrine and said:

Eh fambe, fambe, fambe, ekine; there is nothing. The point is that Sunday and his people have brought drinks to you. They have come to take photographs of you. So they have brought these drinks. Now you should take good care of them. Let success follow all their endeavours. Let success attend to us who are talking here as well. They have come to take photographs of you. We are supposed to open our hearts to them. We therefore ask you to drink because they have given us drinks, which we wish to drink.

He then poured the drinks into the hole in front of him a few times, and as he did so, he continued to call the deities by name:

"Drink, ekine-gbugbu, asain-gidi,<sup>39</sup> you drink all of it."

He then poured a few more libations and offered drink offering to the gods. After this, the person serving took the drink and gave it to Mr. Okoro Okpogia, sitting at the left hand corner of the shrine. He held the glass in his



**PLATE 17** - Okoro Okpogia, priest of Egbe, dancing in the shrine at Swali during the receding flood divination.



hand and said:

Egbe, Egbe, there is nothing else. Our ancestors used to worship you before this time. Now it is our turn. As we are worshipping you, whenever we say it is time, then it is time. When we call upon your name and say save us till we arrive home, save us till we arrive home. Then you have always saved us till we arrived home. Both young and old call upon you. Whenever there is evil, you protect. But whenever there is goodness, you march forward. We who are worshipping you; when we say we are worshipping you, we actually worship you. There is no going back. That is all. We are to save one another. When we call upon you to save us, then all you do is to keep on saving us. Please drink. (See Plate 17; note the priest of Egbe dancing for his idiomu.)

Mr Okoro then poured his own libation into the hole before him in front of the shrine. He drank none of the drink in the glass. All was poured into the hole. The bottler or the person serving them poured more drinks into the glass and gave it yet to another person called Marcus Obi, the priest of Utoken. With the drink, Marcus Obi walked to the bottom of the young cotton tree, sat down, and offered his own libation, saying:

Eh, Utoken Swali, Utoken Swali; there is nothing else. Sunday and his people have brought this drink for you to drink. He wants to take photographs of you. That is why they have brought this drink. Now drink it, and grant prosperity to all what they have come to do. We who are working, let good follow us too. When there is food, it would be for us all. When there is protection, it would be for all. This is the drink Sunday has brought in order to take photographs of you.



**PLATE 18** - Marcus Obi, priest of Utoken at Swali pouring libation at the bottom of the 'cotton tree', akaa, which symbolizes Utoken.



**PLATE 19** - Marcus Obi, priest of Utoken at Swali pouring libation at the bottom of the 'cotton tree', akaa, which symbolizes Utoken.

(See Plates 18 and 19; note the libation being poured at the bottom of the cotton tree which represents Utoken).

Marcus Obi then poured the libation continuously until the glass was completely emptied. Then he gave the empty glass to the person serving who took it and gave more drinks to Chief Egedegu Ekpeku. This was called isi-idi, 'bottom of the drink'. Chief Egedegu Ekpeku took the glass, stood up from his seat and walked towards the water front, facing the little river. At this time, the flood waters which began ~~early~~ in July were now abating. He stood at the edge, poured a little libation, and said:

Obumu, Obumu, Obumu (meaning, 'sand, sand, sand' which could also be the name of a deity). This drink is brought to us by Sunday. He said he wants to take photographs of you. That is why they are here today. Hence I expect good to come out of everything. Whatever they do, grant them success. Let 'every evil', isini-dieli remain behind far away, therefore you may drink.

Chief Egedegu Ekpeku then poured more libations; took a look at the river and the waterside and poured some more libations. As he poured, he said:

Ekine, Ekine, Ekine-gbugbu, this is yours. You should now drink. You have seen all what is going on here just as we are seeing. To render help to people is what we want. When we bring the sick to you, we want instant healing after the discussion. If there is no healing, then it is not good. It would then be hard for me because izibe has taken. Then we have to leave. So take, have this drink and drink it.



PLATE 20 Egedegu Ekpeku pouring  
libation at the water front to  
idiomu.

The Chief continued to pour more libations. And seeing that the glass was being emptied, he said:

He who failed to drink the idem, 'beginning', should drink the isi, 'bottom'. And let everything said be said with one voice. We cannot repeat. (See Plate 20; Chief Egedegu Ekpeku pouring libation).

Having said that, he poured the final libation, took his seat and the worship session began after the rest of the worshippers had been served their drinks. It was now time for clapping, dancing, singing and rejoicing. This was followed by the divination exercise.

Mr. Bibitarigha Uko and his assistant took the Ugbolo for the divination exercise. Before proceeding, Mr. Uko took a glass of drink and said:

Ekine, Ekbe, with this drink we put you on. What the man has come for, tell him. After telling him, let him recover and be well. (This seemed to be a misunderstanding since none of us was sick). Let those who are following you be healthy as well as those who are sitting at the corner. Let all things that wish this village good be available to tell these people something good regarding what they have come to do. This is the drink given to Fambe. That is all.

And the worshippers echoed together saying, "yea, the drink of Fambe". Proceeding with the divination exercise, Mr. Uko said:





**PLATE 21** - Note the palm fronds on the shrine that serve as special decorations or curtains.

Ekine, the purpose for which the man has come, let him return healthy. Nothing evil should happen in this village. The evil should be removed by pumu, 'purification'.

There was a constant nodding with the Ugbolo to all these statements. The nodding continued and briefly interrupted the exercise. Having resumed, the priest of Utoken said:

You have come back. (In the interim, the Ugbolo and its bearers swerved about and returned). You have returned. There is nothing. The people have come to take photographs of you, so we said you must be informed. That is why we have put you on. You should now look at the Utoken, 'the land of the village'. Should there be any pending calamity, we want you to say it. You are also free to tell these our visitors anything about them. That is why you are on. It is finished.

The Ugbolo and the two bearers now turned around several times, went into the shrine and touched ekine, then stood. Chief Egedegu Ekpeku took over to interrogate the Ugbolo saying:

"Is the owner not here? Something will happen in this village. You are asking for something." To all these questions the Ugbolo said, "No!". Then one of the priests asked: "You want food?" and it answered, "Yes". (See Plate 21; note the palm fronds in the shrine).

The Ugbolo went to the waterside, pointed at the abating flood waters and came back and stood still. The priests must now ask appropriate questions intended to elicit what



PLATE 22 - The ugbolo diviners at the water front at Swali. The sea weeds are indicative of the receding flood waters.



PLATE 23 - The ugbolo diviners at the water front at Swali. The sea weeds are indicative of the receding flood waters.



the Ugbolo was saying. Therefore one of the priests said:

You are asking something from the whole village. You have not got your food after they had talked with you. You want that food. When you get angry then they will say you are rascally.

To these questions, the Ugbolo nodded positively until it pinned itself forcefully on the ground, probably in order to emphasise what was said above. Continuing, the interrogator said:

You have worked, so you must eat. You therefore want your food. This food must be produced by the entire village of Swali; it is not the exclusive responsibility of only one person. The food you want is drink, because the flood waters are receding. We have seen; we shall pay. (See Plates 22 and 23; note the Ugbolo diviners at the water front).

Again to all these, the Ugbolo continued to nod. Egedegu Ekpeku then took a glass of drink, poured more libations, and promised to ensure that what the deities want will be given. He implored that the village is small and still has more space for expansion and growth. More children would therefore be appreciated for members of the community in the coming new year. He then poured his final libation.

Mr. Okoru Akpogia followed with his libation.

Eh, Egbe, Egbe, Egbe, Egbe, these people who have now taken your photograph, protect them wherever they go. However, should there be evil on their way through their journeys, then cause them weakness

that they do not travel but remain at home. Drink your drink.

This was followed by the priest of Utoken, and finally by Egedegu to conclude. The isi-idi, 'bottom of the drink' was given to Egedegu who tasted it and gave it to Okoro. Okoro also tasted and passed it back to Egedegu who drank a little and poured the rest into the hole as libation. This concluded the exercise.

### Analysis

This is similar to that obtained at Akaba in the sense that on both occasions, the Ugbolo, a variation of aganaga is used. Nonetheless, it is different in the respect that the 'shrine', ugula at Swali was not just for one idiomu, but for four different deities, namely, Egbe, Ebine, and Fambe; Utoken, the fourth idiomu is represented by a cotton tree outside. As a result, there are four different priests with their separate ugula, 'shrines' housed in the same little 'house for idiomu', locally called ufam-idiomu. This is so probably because all four deities are recognized as 'community deities', idiomu-eken; the ufam-idiomu has therefore become like the community centre, representing the 'village land' or Utoken, where devotees meet for worship, fellowship, offer sacrifices and libations to their idiomu, and also perform divination. But by contrast, G.O.M. Tasie has suggested that it is not usual for Kalabari divinities to remain closely together and share facilities. They

scarcely permit photographs taken in their shrines because they want to avoid a flash light being used which may cause conflict between them and Amadioha, the god of lightening. Amadioha is mainly a deity in the Ibo area, and therefore has no relevance with people in Epie-Atissa. But Amadioha has been given a place in Kalabari area and has therefore become one of their major deities.<sup>40</sup> However, in the situation at Swali, permission was sought, and libations were offered to the various idionu before photographs were taken.

Another aspect is the poetic way in which the deities were approached. For example, Mr. Okoro Okpogia's discussion with his deity called Egbe seems to portray this. As a result the statements are repeated from time to time, almost as though he was changing them.

As indicated (see above, pp.146-150), the idionu, Egbe, is repeated twice by name. This contrasts with that of Fambe that is repeated three times, and corresponds with Utoken Swali repeated twice. Chief Egedegu Ekpeku calls the name of the deity, Obumu, 'sand', three times, and also calls Ekine, three times. Finally, Okoro calls Egbe, three times. Thus all the deities are addressed by name more than once; and this is done rhythmically, in the same way as the address itself.

It thus shows a basic, fundamental correlation with the ritual art of libation in Ga, in which there is a period of

interchange between prayer, libation, and prayer, libation.<sup>41</sup> The prayer that follows is then rhythmical. It is also similar to the repetitive and rhythmical way prayers are offered during the initiation of diviners among the Bena Lulua,<sup>42</sup> and also with the Ifa in which parts of the structure of ese-Ifa are repeated.<sup>43</sup>

The other aspect is the way the drink of kaikai is served. Of the two bottles of kaikai presented, one bottle was served exclusively to the deities. The priests either poured their portions into the holes, dug in front of the relevant partition for each deity; or in case of Utoken, its own portion was poured away completely at the bottom of the cotton tree. That of Obumu, 'sand', was not poured into a hole, since there was none for it; but the priest drained all away near the water front in the direction of the river, known to be the abode of the deity 'sand'. In Epie-Atissa, 'the water front' is called akun-amini, literally meaning 'water teeth'.

There was order in the way the kaikai was served to the deities. No clear order seemed to have been followed when Mr. Bibitarigha Uko made the introduction. He simply knelt beneath the cotton tree of Utoken, and there poured all the necessary libation. But when the priests of the various deities took over, the drink was served in the following order:

Chief Egedegu Ekpeku, priest of Fambe and Ekine started

first. But the first drink went to Utoken during the introduction; then Fambe and Ekine. After this Okoro Okopogia, priest of Egbe followed; Utoken was next, the priest being Marcus Obi. Chief Egedegu Ekpeku finally took and gave drink to Obumu, but reserved the isi-idi, 'bottom of the drink', to Ekine. Thus idem-idi, 'beginning or tongue drink', went to Utoken, indicating its seniority above the other deities. According to tradition, the idem-idi always goes to the most senior in the gathering. It is he who pours the libation and helps himself first before all others. He also gets the isi-idi, 'bottom drink', but it was given to Ekine instead, with the comment; "He who fails to drink idem, should drink isi". This would mean that in their rating, Ekine is next in rank to Utoken. Among the priests, Chief Egedegu Ekpeku took both the idem and isi-idi, indisputably.

The climax of the exercise was when the Ugbolo went to akun-amini, 'water-front', came back, touched Ekine in the shrine and stood still. They failed to understand what that meant. Although when asked to know if something will happen in the village, for which something was needed, the answer was, 'No!', it happened that a few weeks after that, Mr. Okoro Okpogia, priest of Egbe died suddenly, without any further warning. This may indicate that the deities were already angry because they failed to fulfil their promise in time. Although it is also possible he died of natural causes, the absence of autopsy deprives us of this fact. But the people think the deities were angry, so appropriate

redressive measures were taken. Only this time, it was decided that non-cultic members ~~would~~ not be permitted to participate and take photographs in their shrine.

And also important is the significance of <sup>the</sup> cotton tree, locally called akaa, being used as a symbol of Utoken. In Epie-Atissa, akaa, 'cotton tree', is sometimes regarded as sacred for several reasons. First, it is a tree that grows wild, having enormously strong branches, trunk and roots, when fully developed. Secondly, it develops thorns which make it difficult for people to either climb or seek shelter beneath it. Thirdly, since it has strong branches, it is able to withstand the strongest gale, even when other trees cannot. It is therefore revered because of its great strength. Furthermore, akaa produces cotton wool, which is a white downy fibrous substance used in making cloth and thread etc. It is believed that 'witches', igbani-ida, use the cotton tree as their place of meeting.

'Cotton tree', akaa, is also revered among the Yorubas and it is among "4 of such cultivated plants namely owu (the cotton tree), agbado (the maize plant), agbagba (plantain), and bara (the melon plant)",<sup>44</sup> about which the Ifa priests have developed special Ifa poetry, called ese Ifa. In this ese Ifa for akaa, or owu, 'cotton tree', emphasis is placed "on the conditions favourable to the growth of the cotton plant",<sup>45</sup> such as, gentle rainfall, plenty of dew-drops, and sunny weather.

In Epie-Atissa however, there is a folk-tale about akaa, 'cotton tree', which children developed into a folk-song. It talks about how, in spite of its enormous strength, the wind became so strong that it broke the 'cotton tree'. The 'wind', ovulovulo, is therefore stronger than the akaa, the 'cotton tree', which to the children, is a great surprise. This shows how people in that culture hold akaa in great esteem, and its being a symbol of Utoken at Swali would be easily acceptable.

But the theoretical framework advanced by this particular type of divinatory practice with reference to 'the receding flood waters', is in connection with the concept of social control in relation to Epie-Atissa community. According to Seymour-Smith, the term 'social control' may be applied widely "to all types of forces and constraints which induce conformity to norms and customs in human society."<sup>46</sup>

Although there is the tendency in most communities in the Niger Delta to ensure that ~~certain~~ decisions affecting the whole community are properly debated and deliberated upon by a majority of the adult male population,<sup>47</sup> they are not always capable of enforcing discipline. This is because according to the functionalists' approach, and also as expressed by Durkheim, there are always deviants in every society who would challenge conformity, in spite of the pressure to conform as "an expression of the interest of the collectivity".<sup>48</sup> As a result, among some of the mechanisms of social control in Epie-Atissa are the deities and the diviners who are able to pin-point individuals who have



**PLATE 24** - Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, fully attired in front of the ugula, 'shrine'.



violated the social norms and therefore committed offence not only <sup>against</sup> the community but also <sup>against</sup> the gods. The diviners are therefore empowered to find out why the gods are angry. This is because for social order to exist in places where people live far away from the visible law enforcement agencies like the police and the armed forces, the invisible forces must act so that conformity to the norms and values of the Society must be enforced.<sup>49</sup>

#### Ugbolo Divination at the Shrine of Aruku-Eken, Famgbe

Another place in Epie-Atissa where Ugbolo divination is practised is Famgbe, a place with a population of about 2574 inhabitants, according to the demographic figures in 1983. Here the predominant idiomu is Aruku-eken, a counterpart of Aruku-egene at Akaba. Mr. Harvest Izonfatei who was born in 1942, is the ebeni-idiomu, 'chief priest'. Like the Aruku-egene at Akaba, the Aruku-eken at Famgbe is also idiomu ikoni, 'deity of war and chivalry', but at peace time, it is more concerned with the protection of the community. As a result, it ensures that 'taboos', locally known as isini-agugulu, literally meaning, 'things-forbidden' are not violated. But those who did so may come for restoration. Thus it is one of the assignments of Harvest Izonfatei to ensure that associated rituals are well maintained. (See Plate 24, showing the ebeni-idiomu in front of ugula Aruku-eken.)

According to Harvest Izonfatei, one such taboo, for which the person must ~~have to~~ undergo a 'purification rite', is in connection with sexual taboos. For example, if a woman should have sexual relations with her husband or any person for that matter, while still in her menstrual period, a serious taboo would have been violated. As a result, both male and female accomplices would be penalized, and be plagued with a serious calamity. They had violated the laws of the land and inibudu, (see above, p.71). The woman would pay a penalty of a fowl to Aruku-egene, a related idiomu at Famgbe, but the male would be required to shave his head at the ugula of Aruku-eken in the presence of Harvest Izonfatei. The man's hair would be shaved early in the morning, and he would then undergo the ceremonial ritual of pumu.

For this ritual, he would be required to produce some palm fronds, and some empty shells of eggs of a hen that had just hatched her chicks. The shells must not be from eggs broken by human effort. These items are then used to 'purify' or pumu the man by touching him with the items from his head to his feet. All the man's joints are touched three times each with the items. After which the materials used are divided into two parts, and the pumu ritual repeated again. The purpose is to eliminate weakness that could cause him serious illness. The pumu rite is therefore intended to avoid whatever evil that could have befallen him. At the end of the exercise, the man then presents a bottle of kaikai to Aruku-eken and says: "My body was polluted; but now I have

been purified. This is my drink."

The chief priest receives the drink from him and responds by saying:

Aruku-eken, Aruku-eken, today John has purified himself. That which caused his pollution has been removed, cleansed and purified through the rite of pumu. From henceforth, let him be healthy and without further infirmities. A man must be healthy always. Therefore drink this kaikai and let him be released from any bondage arising from this misdeed.

The appropriate libations are then poured in accordance with the prescribed pattern. Then all the worshippers partake in consuming the rest of the drink. Unless this is done, the person concerned may undergo defeat at the hands of his enemies, especially in the case of single combat, or in any kind of warfare. This is because he is affected by evil, and so has little or no power again to fight and win. Thus, in the days of old, he would be barred from participating in any kind of warfare until purified. Similarly, he was not supposed to have had any sexual intercourse with any woman, even his wife, before going to war. Such actions would cause the protection of Aruku-eken to be lifted and hence fatalistic. Hence the concept of pumu is widespread in Epie-Atissa, but the ritual just described seems peculiar to Famgbe only where this tradition seems to be more pronounced and popular.



PLATE 25 - Harvest Izonfatei, ebeni-idiomu, 'chief priest' of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, with his cultic officials in front of the ugula.



PLATE 26 - Ugbolo diviners at Famgbe are Surere Uku and Kikio, cultic adepts at Aruku-eken shrine.

Since it is the premier deity at Famgbe, the ugula of Aruku-eken is conspicuously situated at the waterside, with its entrance facing the river. It is built with only one window, but without any image as was the case with Orisa at Akaba. But as in the case of Orisa, the ugula is built with mud and roofed with zinc. Behind the ugula is a thick bush which people are forbidden to cut. It is believed that every blade of grass represents Aruku-eken; hence to cut it is to destroy its sanctity. But the surroundings are maintained from time to time by the cultic officials in rotation. (See Plate 25, which shows Mr. Harvest Izonfatei, ebeni-idiomu of Aruku-eken, with the cultic officials in front of the ugula). While the cultic members are appointed according to need, membership is automatic to any citizen of Famgbe. People are therefore encouraged to bring their problems.

Serious divinatory seances and related ceremonies are held there on every four days, especially on the day called, ede-wiye-deke, which is regarded as 'the heathens' sabbath day. And the only instrument employed for divination is the Ugbolo, 'staff', borne by two. The more experienced of the two stays in the front. The two persons so noted are Mr. Surere Uku who is the most experienced among them all, so he stays in front. Then either Mr. Kiokio or in his absence, Mr. Clerk stays behind. Thus in Plate 26, Mr. Surere Uku takes the lead, with Mr. Kiokio following with the Ugbolo on their shoulders ready for a time of divining.



**PLATE 27** - Harvest Izonfatei and his devotees in Aruku-eken shrine maintain order in seating arrangements and their top clothes are taken off before entering the shrine. The chief priest hangs his on the wall, and serious atmosphere is maintained.

By tradition, all the cultic officials perform their cultic assignments bare-bodied. Therefore before entering the ugula, they all remove their shirts, shoes, rings, wristwatches, etc. Those who have come for consultations also do the same, but they may be allowed to leave their tops. This contrasts with what obtains at the ugula of Orisa at Akaba, where people are comparatively well dressed and even enter into the ugula with their shoes and everything else, without any restrictions. This is also the case at Swali. Famgbe seems to be the only exception. The ebeni-idiomu is usually attired in white, but in the ugula he also removes the top, hanging it on the wall near the little stool, on which he normally sits. But he covers his head with a white cap onto which he pins a white eagle's feather, the significance of which will be dealt with later. (This is clearly depicted in Plate 27; note the seating position of the ebeni-idiomu; the tops hanging on the wall and the serious atmosphere).

Once inside the ugula of Aruku-eken, all communications with people outside are prohibited. Everything is done according to order, including the seating positions. According to custom, and as was explained by Harvest Izonfatei, the ebeni-idiomu and three of his immediate officials sit on little stools at the centre, while the rest sit on benches improvised near each side of the wall. This contrasts with what obtains in the shrine of Owomekaso in Buguma, in Kalabari area, where the seats are simply "logs of wood that are occasionally used in cooking sacrifices."<sup>50</sup> More

specifically, the ebeni-idiomu sits on a little stool, with his back to the window, facing the entrance. This may correspond with the type of stool used by babalawo, the Ifa priest inside an Ifa house, where he sits, "surrounded by his collection of professional necessities which include tokens of food and drinks for ancestor spirits."<sup>51</sup> In front of him on the floor is an artificial round hole, so created by the constant libation of kaikai on the spot. As a result, this hole is never dry, but always wet. It would be recalled that the priests at Swali poured their libations to their various idiomu into similar holes in the ufam-idiomu which collectively houses all the important deities in that community. It may therefore not be peculiar to Famgbe only. Nevertheless, since most of what they do at the shrine of Aruku-eken is ceremonial and ritualistic, the seating arrangement is such that Frank Manpassman, 'the bottler' sits opposite Harvest Izonfatei, the ebeni-diomu, with his back to the entrance. Then Mr. Josiah Oniesika, who is the priest of Benikurukuru, his family idiomu, sits to the left of the ebeni-idiomu, while Mr. Surere Oku, priest of the community idiomu, Utoken, sits to the right of the chief. After these three persons have taken their seats, then the rest now sit down on the benches already mentioned.

This is followed by another ritual in which all the cultic officials rub white chalk round their right eyes; this ritual is locally known as poko-adu. The word adu means 'eye'; and poko is a verb, meaning 'to dig round'. But the 'digging' intended in the case of poko in this ritual



conveys a meaning synonymous with 'ring round'. Thus a ring is made around the right eye with the white chalk, a ritual which further differentiates the cultic official from the ordinary person, and gives him the adu, 'eye' of idiomu.

It would be recalled that a similar concept concerning the use of 'chalk' utiin, was mentioned in connection with the woman who went to Orisa shrine at Akaba with earache (see above, pp.126f).

Nevertheless, that is not all as regards the place of utiin in rituals in Famgbe. Another ritual related to that of poko adu performed by the worshippers in the shrine of Aruku-eken, is known technically as, kee ubo, meaning, 'split the hand'. This is to be done in such a way that if the hand were to be 'split' physically, it would go through the middle. The hand so 'split' is the right hand only; not the left. Thus, the right hand is ritually 'split' with white 'chalk', utiin, from the end of the middle finger to the shoulder. Thus, while the ritual of poku-adu implies that the worshipper sees supernaturally as the idiomu, 'deity', the ritual of kee ubo has reference to the ceremony called Okumo, an important victory ceremony. The most significant aspect of this ceremony is that the celebrant stretches out his right hand at a particular stage, facing the improvised ugula constructed in an open field, and shouts the 'victory shout' called lala ogbo. The importance of this ceremony has already been emphasized (see above, p.69). But it should be remembered that Aruku-eken is a



**PLATE 28** - Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Orisa and Aruku-egene at Akaba performs the ritual of Okumo and appears war-like.



**PLATE 29** - Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken at Akaba also appears war-like.

deity of war and chivalry; therefore several things are done differently from what obtained with Orisa at Akaba, which by contrast is a female, fertility deity.

Nevertheless, as the ebeni-idiomu of Aruku-egene, which is also a deity of war, Simeon Tinbiri at Akaba puts on the marks connected with all the three ideas mentioned. But he does not put them on at the shrine of Orisa, but from his house (see Plate 28). Thus while at Akaba, only the priests of Aruku-egene and Utoken may appear war-like in Orisa's shrine, at Famgbe, all the worshippers do so at ugula Aruku-eken. Hence the rituals of poku-adu, kee-ubo and lala-ogbo are specifically built in as necessary aspects of reverence to Aruku-eken intended to convey the import of a war like deity. In Plate 29, Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken at Akaba is also attired in the same war-like manner, but others are not.

The ritual of lala ogbo is then followed by yet another ritual called isini mo, meaning 'there is nothing' or 'nothing will happen'. Here, the word isini means 'something', and mo means 'nothing'. Hence isini mo may be translated literally as, 'something is nothing'. Again this indicates a situation of war in which the enemy is regarded as 'nothing', an idea conveyed in the word, mo. This ritual is regarded as a 'solidarity and agreement ritual' which the ebeni-idiomu and all the cultic worshippers of Aruku-eken must echo in unison before they engage in any kind of religious assignment in the ugula. As a result, the worshippers would rise and proceed one after

the other to the hole in front of the ebeni-idiomu. Each person would then forcefully sprinkle white chalk into the hole, three times, and each time, the person would forcefully ask the question: isini-voni yinewa?, meaning, 'what will happen?' Here, the word, voni, means 'what?' The meaning of isini is already known; the word yine is a verb, meaning, 'to happen'. But the wa is only a suffix which gives the sentence an interrogative dimension. A literary translation of the statement should therefore be: 'What is something that will happen?' And the rest will respond in unison, isini mo, 'nothing', or 'there is nothing', or 'nothing will happen'.

One advantage of this 'solidarity and agreement ritual', is that it enables all the worshippers together with their chief, to see and do things with a single heart. It enables them to agree with one mind that no problem is beyond the solution of Aruku-eken. It is only after this ritual that the ebeni-idiomu then presents or introduces the problem to Aruku-eken. On the day of this interview on Friday, August 9, 1985, there were twelve cultic worshippers in all, including the chief as indicated in Plate 25.

#### Introduction of Problem:

This also has a ritual content to it. The problem was that on the day already mentioned, this writer and one of his colleagues had arrived there in order to find out what things take place in that shrine in the area of divination. Since we were already in the shrine, our mission must be

introduced to Aruku-eken, in order to justify the purpose of the gathering. Therefore, we were asked to produce a bottle of kaikai. Holding this bottle in his hand, the ebeni-idiomu said:

Aruku-eken, Aruku-eken, Aruku-eken; today your visitors are Sunday Fefegha and Otobotekere's son. What they want is that good should come to this town, this area, their children and their wives. Therefore today that they have entered here, you should go ahead of them in all their undertakings in connection with their project. Grant them long life till such a time that their children would replace them and only God is capable to call them home. That is what we want. Therefore with this drink, you are implored to help and protect them and only God is capable to call them home. That is what we want. Therefore with this drink, you are implored to help and protect them. This is all I have to say. The matter is finished.

Having said this, all the worshippers answered saying:

"Yea, idi Aruku-eken", meaning "Yea, Aruku-eken's drink".

Still continuing with the introduction, he said:

He has entered here as your visitor because he wants to make your activities known. It is not good that the traditions and customs of the area should perish. So he is here to help preserve them. This drink which is being offered to you is meant for you to preserve and protect him and his colleagues, their wives, children and friends. You should also preserve and protect all of us who are your worshippers, the town of Famgbe, and the entire Atissa Clan. Protection is your primary assignment.

We want somebody big and important to come forth from this area, so that we as a people will not continue to suffer in the hands of strangers and other people. May we also be able to put our hands on others, so as a people we may also be regarded in this world as a people, even by people in the



**PLATE 30** - Wariseimo Osinbiri, onyo-so-idi, 'bottler' at Aruku-eken shrine at Famgbe, performing his cultic duty. Note the real India cloth or njiri, 'george', tied around his waist indicative of his place in the cultic scene. Compare with Plate 9.

Western world. Therefore drink this, and protection belongs to you.

Having said this, he poured some libations of kaikai into the hole in front of him. Then the 'bottler', Mr. Wariseimo Osinbiri, took the bottle from the chief, in order to ensure that the prescribed ritual procedure of serving the drink was maintained. (See Plate 30, which shows Mr. Wariseimo Osinbiri, with the bottle of kaikai in his hand, about to serve. Note that the bottle is held in his left hand, in a very peculiar way. Also note the visible signs of poko adu and kee ubo. The cloth tied around his waist is the 'real India', locally called injiri or 'george'. It was first introduced to people in the Niger Delta by the Portuguese,<sup>52</sup> and for many years afterwards and till now, has become the traditional dress of the chiefs in the Niger Delta, and specifically worn during ceremonial occasions. It is also worn by priests of various deities in their shrines, as indicated in Plate 9. There, both Simeon Tinbiri, ebeni-idiomu of Orisa and Aruku-egene, and Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, ebeni-eken idiomu of Akaba, are tying different kinds of it).

Continuing, Mr. Osinbiri put the first part of the drink, technically called, idem idi, into the glass which was in his right hand, and he lifted it over his right shoulder, and poured away the entire contents toward the entrance. He did so without turning his head around in order to see where the drink fell. He has been doing so over the years so only





**PLATE 31** - The chief priest receives the glass of kaikai, pours the libation before passing it on. Everything is done ritualistically in the shrine of Aruku-eken at Famgbe.



his right hand moved above his right shoulder. The idea was Aruku-eken was to have the first taste of the drink. It is therefore similar to what was described earlier in connection with Ugbolo divination at the shrine of Utoken at Swali, but it is more methodical here. After the idem-idi has been given in that way to Aruku-eken, the 'bottler' now served himself. But after filling the glass, he gave it to the chief priest who poured part of it into the hole as libation, before giving the balance to Mr. Osinbiri, which he drank. Then Mr. Josiah Oniesika, on the right and Mr. Surere Oku on the left of the chief were served. But in each case, the glass of drink was given to the chief, who poured the libation before giving it to the person concerned. (See Plate 31, in which the ebeni-idiomu receives the glass, pours the required libation before passing it on).

After these three persons, including the chief had had their share, then the rest of the worshippers were served. Finally, the chief was given what is called otiem, meaning 'the touch', or 'the sip'. In this case, everybody 'sips' only a little of the kaikai from the little glass. The law in this particular instance is that the drink must be 'sipped' in such a way that there must be a bit left in the glass as the isi-idi, 'bottom of drink'. Only the ebeni-idiomu can empty the isi-idi in the proper manner. Any other person who does it other than the ebeni-idiomu pays a fine of a full bottle of kaikai. Holding the isi-idi in his hand, Harvest Izonfatei now said, addressing

Aruku-eken:

This is the isi-idi, 'the bottom of the drink'. We are laying one emphasis, that is, that you should drink this and protect your children, your friends, your worshippers and the entire area. That is your specific assignment. Drink and the protection is yours.

After saying this, he sipped a little, then handed the glass over to Josiah Oniesika, on the right, and Surere Oku on the left, and back to Wariseimo Osinbiri, the 'bottler'. They each sipped a little, and the last bit was then handed over to Harvest Izonfatei. With that, he poured the last libation, and said: "Drink, and protection is yours. This is the isi-idi, 'bottom-drink'."

This ended the first part of the matter which gave an insight into some of the rituals in the cult of Aruku-eken. But this writer's question was, if that much time is spent sharing drinks ritualistically, how much time will they actually have in responding to the needs of their clients? Replying, the ebeni-idiomu, Harvest Izonfatei said that they are bound to follow the traditional ways of doing things, especially in the 'shrine', ugula of Aruku-eken. Otherwise, he was sure that it will be rather disastrous, first to him, then to the devotees and then to the entire community. This is because there are meanings attached to every action and ritual. Failure to observe and perform such rituals is to

miss some of the meanings that are symbolically potent with power. For example, the drink poured backwards toward the entrance conveys the significant meaning that the supreme deity of Famgbe, Aruku-eken is given first place in all that takes place in that shrine. Thus, while holding the drink,

I have to realize that there is something in front of me. There is something as well to my right; and all these forces must be brought together in the matter. Therefore, if someone entered into the ugula of Aruku-eken with an evil intention, he would certainly return with his evil. But should he come with good intentions, good will always abide with him. That is why the drink is poured backward first, before the commencement of the actual ritual of the pouring of libations.

### Conclusion

From all that has been said, it could be seen that the main type of divinatory practice in Epie-Atissa is the communally approved divination. These are divided into two types, the aganaga, 'ladder', divination being the main one, and the Ugbolo, 'staff' divination being a variation of the first. The aganaga, is the means by which members of the community could communicate with their departed members, hence with the 'ancestors', inibudu. This is done only when death has occurred because the knowledge of how and why the person died determines the type and place of the person's burial. It is therefore specifically controlled by Utoken, which superintends over the affairs of the community.

The Ugbolo, 'staff' divination deals with crises related problems which people encounter from day to day. As a result it is more varied, and includes sicknesses in general, such as, Chief Macauley Saife's sickness, and Mammy Ogbolo's earache; or the community problems, such as situations regarding the recession of high flood waters at Swali, for which necessary consultations were to be made with the various divinities.

Since the aganaga and Ugbolo types of divination are communal, they have a number of characteristics which are peculiar to them only. First, the cultic personnel are all adepts who are members of the community. They are presided over by a 'chief priest', ebeni-idiomu, whose appointment must primarily be as a result of the call, but must nonetheless also be a full citizen of the community. That is, his claim to the throne of 'chief priest' of Utoken, for example, must be through the father, and not through the mother. As a result, a woman can neither be the 'chief priest' of any community deity in Epie-Atissa, nor even as a member of the cultic personnel. All must be male.

The second characteristic is that such cultic-adepts must be familiar with the cosmology of Epie-Atissa. In other words, they have a world view which represents the world view of the generality of the people in Epie-Atissa. The various concepts that constitute this world view are considered as reality, but cannot be directly observed by the Western

mind. This is because in Epie-Atissa, the diviners, the cultic-adepts and those who practice witchcraft, have special relations with the invisible. This is the world inhabited by the ancestors who live in their separate, invisible "community and communicate with the living through their vital force."<sup>53</sup> Eric Carlton defines cosmology as "an explanatory system which offers a reasonably comprehensive set of answers to the problems relating to man's place in the universe."<sup>54</sup> Explanations given in connection with cosmologies are usually mythico-spiritual in form, and are therefore outside the purview of any scientific evaluation. It is within this context that diviners in Epie-Atissa give explanations concerning the problems of evil, suffering and death, and other matters related to their concept of theodicy. This is why prescriptions for the cure of Chief Macauley Saife's illness includes the use of a new Bible in the burial ground, the hanging of the white man's cross on his door post, the burning of candles around his sick bed; offering of sacrifices which include parched food and the lizard offered as scape-goat (see above. pp.106ff). The point here is that the items such as the Bible, the cross and even the candles are Christian in origin; the concept of the scape-goat is Hebraic. It therefore seems striking that diviners in a completely non-Christian setting would appeal to purely Christian symbols in Orisa shrine.

It is in their attempt to explain the way the 'supreme God', Izibe, or the 'gods', idiomu interact with men that epistemological concepts seem to develop. It could be seen

that in every case of either the aganaga or Ugbolo divination, there seems to be a definite procedure in which the matter is approached from the general to the particular. They seem to advance their arguments logically, consistently and objectively. The diviners therefore endeavour to avoid all inconsistencies by adopting some divinatory language techniques, such as symbols and signs. By means of these, the diviners are able to construct certain conceptual and logical rules, which they follow in order to accomplish their purpose. For example, in the aganaga divinatory seance in connection with witchcraft at Akaba, a variety of terms and concepts relating to Epie-Atissa cosmology were used (see above, pp.67f), probably because the desire to know, that is the cognitive aspect of the events, become very crucial. They are not any longer concerned about why he died, but more about the damage done to the community by this man with his witchcraft. But on the contrary, the Ugbolo divination in connection with the illness of a 'village chief', obeneken, in the hospital, and that of a woman suffering from earache, the same people became very emotional. They did everything possible to encourage and help. For this reason, it is the view of Turner, that in divinatory symbolism, especially with regard to death, "the cognitive aspect is much more pronounced; in symbolism of life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction, the orectic aspect, that concerned with feelings and desires, is clearly dominant."<sup>55</sup>

Functionally, the Ugbolo divination in connection with Chief

Macauley Saife, accomplished 4 things, namely: first, to expose the hidden conflicts between the chief and his opponents; second, to intervene in the conflict; third, to sue for peace, and fourth, to heal and restore the broken relationship. It is this function inherent in divination that both Turner and Zuesse refer to as the cybernetic function of divination, "a mechanism of social redress."<sup>56</sup>

## CHAPTER 2

### FOOTNOTES

1. The informants include all the members of the cultic personnel attached to Orisa and Aruku-egene shrines at Akaba, who were interviewed on 7th February, 1986.
2. E. J. Alagoa, op.cit, p.16.
3. There are various types of 'sacrifices', in Epe-Atissa. The most common type is the communion, known biblically as sacrifice of peace-offering', in which the devotees share in the meal. For details, see S.A. Fefegha, 'Sacrifice in Ancient Israel', M. Phil. Thesis (1981); also A.F. Rainey, 'Sacrifice and Offerings', The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Merrill C. Tenney (ed), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1975), pp. 194-211.
4. See Robin Horton, 'Destiny and the Unconscious in West Africa', Africa, 31 (1971), pp.110-116; also Igor Kopytoff, 'Knowledge and Belief in Suku Thought', Africa, 51, 3 (1981), pp.709-723; Meyer Fortes, Oedipus and Job in West Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pp.7ff.
5. Wande Abimbola, Ifa, An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus, op. cit., p.113.
6. Idem.; also see E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Amongst the Yoruba (London: Ethnographica, (1982), pp.27-28, where similar ideas are expressed.
7. E.J. Alagoa, op. cit., p.16.
8. Idem.
9. Robin Horton, 'Ikpatata Dogi', op. cit. p.59.
10. The concept of fertility deities is common in Africa and also elsewhere. A good example is a recent article by M. Azar and M.W. Fattal (eds), 'Osun - Mystical Goddess of Yoruba Land', Alminbar Tribune (Paris: Alminbar Sarl, 1986), pp.16-19, in which it was stated that each Yoruba town has its own particular fertility goddess, to which certain ceremonies are addressed during certain periods of the year. One of the most prominent deities among the people of Oshogbo is Osun, the goddess of protection, peace and fertility. John Ferguson, The Religions of the Roman Empire (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), pp.13-15, writes about similar practices in Europe and the Ancient World.



11. This is parallel to what obtained at Delphi. According to P.E. Easterling and J.V. Muir, Greek Religion and Society, p.135, two statues of Apollo, one in wood and the other in gold, were always kept standing in the temple. One was kept in the sanctum in which was the tomb of another important deity called Dionysus. These gave those who went to Delphi for consultations the confidence that the gods were present and active, and will therefore give them infallible results. Similarly, in the Yoruba area of Western Nigeria, the shrines of the various deities, like Sango, Ogun, Osun, etc., are usually adorned with picturesque carvings and statues of the various deities, probably intended to overwhelm any client with awe. See E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba, pp.14, 20-23, for relevant examples.
12. Wande Abimbola, op. cit., pp.229-230.
13. Geoffrey Hurd, op. cit., pp.97-98.
14. Sam Eriwo, 'Epha: Divination System Among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta', African Notes, op. cit., p.27.
15. W. Bascom, Ifa Divination (1969), pp.3ff; M.Y. Nabofa and Ben O. Elugbe, 'Epha: An Urhobo system of Divination and Its Esoteric Language', Orita, op. cit., pp.5-15.
16. Victor Turner, op. cit., p.3
17. Ibid. p.4.
18. For details concerning possession divination and related characteristics, see Evan M. Zuesse, op. cit., pp.159-160; Renaat Devisch, op. cit., pp.52-53; also Erika Bourguignon, "The Self, the Behavioral Environment and the Theory of Possession", in Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology, ed. Melford E. Spiro (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp.48-49.
19. cf. J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), p.240.
20. Charles Winick, Dictionary of Anthropology (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1970), p.334.
21. The concept of the scape-goat is symbolic also to the Israelites. Even then, what obtains among the spirit mediums in Epie-Atissa and elsewhere have no parallels to what obtained among the prophets in the Bible. For further comments, see M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Oracles and Politics in Ancient Israel', Man, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1977), N.S. 12, pp. 124-140.
22. J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p.69.
23. John Ferguson, The Religion of the Roman Empire (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p.56, links the cross as

a Christian and pagan symbol to other monograms like the Chi-rho, which formed the initial letters of the name of Christ in Greek, which was in use before Constantine.

24. According to E.A. Wallis Budge, Amulets and Superstitions (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1978), pp.336ff, the cross is the oldest amuletic symbol in the world, because the pagan cross predated that of the Christian.

25. The ancient Greeks and Romans used and recognized a variety of omens in their divinatory practices. For details, see: H.J. Rose, Religion in Greece and Rome (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp.35, 234; also A. Fairbanks, Handbook of Greek Religion (New York: American Book Co., 1910), pp.42-46.

26. For the Kalabari concept of oru and owu, see G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.9-11; also Robin Horton, The Gods as Guests (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1960), pp.17-18.

27. cf. G.O.M. Tasie, op. cit., p.34.

28. J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, op. cit., p.125.

29. Napoleon A. Chagnon, Yanomamo, The Fierce People (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), pp.64-65.

30. Ibid., p.117.

31. cf. Kay Williamson and A.O. Timitimi, 'A Note on Ijo Number Symbolism', op. cit., p.15.

32. Francis Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, op. cit., p.109.

33. cf. William A. Haviland, Cultural Anthropology, op. cit., p.329, for further details, especially with reference to the psychological function of religion which is identical with that of divination.

34. As a village situated in the Niger Delta, Akaba falls within the swamp forest belt as the rest of the villages in Epie-Atissa. It falls within the fresh water swamp forest which is characteristically different from the mangrove forest area, the water of which is salty. This belt is characterized by still-rooted trees with a dense undergrowth of shrubs and lianes where the canopy is more open. Raphia and climbing palms are very typical of this zone, and swards of floating grass sometimes occur as well on its periphery. A good example of this is shown in Plates 22 and 23, in connection with the receding flood divination at Swali waterside. But in years past, this belt was noted for its export in lumber economy. It also plays an important role in the local economy as a source of pit-props and of fuel for people who dwell in the coastal areas. The creeks around which Akaba is situated are especially good fishing grounds, with a remarkably vast land for farming and

palm-cutting. It seems understandable therefore why disputes should arise in connection with the location of Akaba.

For further details concerning the economic importance of this geographical area, see K.M. Buchanan, and J.C. Pugh, Land and People in Nigeria, the Human Geography of Nigeria and Its Environmental Background (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1955), p.24f.

35. cf. J.R. Hinnels (ed.), The Penguin Dictionary of Religions (London: Allen Lane, 1984), p.241. Here Orisa is regarded as the most complex pantheon in Africa because of its numerous divinities.

36. For further details, see J.O. Awolalu, Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites, op. cit., pp. 6ff; E.B. Idowu, Olodumare (London: Longman, 1962), p.142f.

37. What occurs here in which Simeon Tinbiri acts as priest of Orisa and also chief priest of Aruku-egene corresponds with a similar situation in Kalabari area in which the priest of Owomekaso acts as the priest of Amadioha because there is no special priest designated to serve Amadioha in Kalabari area. While these are similar occurrences, it is not always common both in Kalabari area and also in Epie-Atissa for one person to perform the functions of priest for two distinct and major idionu. For similar views, see G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion (Berlin: 1977), pp.24, 25.

38. According to P.E. Easterling and J.V. Muir (eds.) The Greek Religion and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.134, the Spartans and the Athenians always sought the opinion of the gods at Delphi before going to war. And those who went to consult the oracles in such circumstances were always men; women were disallowed from such missions. In a way, Aruku-egene is also similar to Sango, the Yoruba deity of war, which is regarded as being fierce and punitive. For details, see E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba (London: 1982), p.21.

39. In this and all other similar occurrences, the priests are simply addressing their various deities by name, and title. The deities mentioned here are ekine, with its title, gbugbu attached. Similarly, Asain is in reference to the legendary, medicinal claypot in the shrine, which according to the related Epie-Atissa legend, used to boil over, thus creating the noise, gidi-gidi. Thus the word gidi is attached to Asain in order to emphasize that ancient legendary power of 'boiling' over, which indicated victory during inter village warfare. Similarly, gbugbu is also attached to ekine in order to emphasize its power. But even more specifically, they are both used onomatopoeically.

40. For more information, see G.O.M. Tasie, op. cit., pp.24-25.

41. Marion Kilson, 'Libation in Ga Ritual', op. cit., pp. 169ff.
42. cf. David A. McLean and Ted J. Solomon, 'Divination Among the Bena Lulua', Journal of Religion in Africa (1971/72) 4, pp.39-41.
43. Wande Abimbola, Ifa, An Exposition of the Ifa Literary Corpus, op. cit., pp. 96ff; also Judith Gleason, A Recitation of Ifa, Oracle of the Yoruba (New York: Grossman Publishers 1973), pp. 73ff.
44. Ibid., p.219.
45. Idem.
46. Charlotte Seymour-Smith, Dictionary of Anthropology (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986), p.259.
47. cf. Philip E. Leis, op. cit., p.170.
48. Charlotte Seymour-Smith, op. cit., p.260.
49. See M. Haralambos, Sociology: A New Approach (Ormskirk: Causeway Press Ltd., 1986), p.19, for details.
50. cf. G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.24.
51. E.M. McClelland, The Cult of the Ifa Among the Yoruba, op. cit., p.103.
52. P. Amaury Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, their Religion and Custom (London: The Sheldon Press, 1932), pp. 279-280; also see G.O.M. Tasie, op. cit., pp.49, 62; both have emphasized that njiri cloth was specifically required for use by the cultic-adepts and devotees in various rituals and feasts in Kalabari traditional religion.
53. Harold Schneider, The Africans, An Ethnological Account (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p.214.
54. Eric Carlton, Patterns of Belief, Religions in Society (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., (1973), p.123.
55. Victor Turner, Ndembu Divination, op. cit., p.15.
56. cf. Victor Turner, Ibid., p.17; also see Evan M. Zuesse, op. cit., p.165.

### CHAPTER 3

#### INDIVIDUAL TYPES OF DIVINATION IN EPIE-ATISSA

In the previous chapter, attention was paid to the communal types of divination in the community, in which the priests and other devotees perform their assignments in the village or community shrines of the various community deities. They are not authorized to operate from their private homes. They therefore operate with the full authority of the whole community.

This is not the case with other, individual types of divination. In this case, the diviners perform individually as mediums of their various, individual deities. Individual 'shrines', ugula are erected for the services of their individual deities in their individual homes. They are accountable to no other person but themselves, and clients are charged for their personal gains. As mediums, they are guided by the particular deity who called them and some of them receive informal training on the job by them. It is therefore the responsibility of each of these diviners to recognize and seek to develop the gifts or esoteric knowledge bestowed on each of them by their individual deities. The gifts therefore determine the type and method of divination.

Nonetheless, there are some basic characteristics which can be identified with the individual types of divination in Epie-Atissa. First it is here that the gender dichotomy in

Epie-Atissa, and in other parts of the Niger Delta seems to be pronounced. This is because while the men operate exclusively in connection with the communal divination, women predominate in individual divination. Although the view has been rightly expressed by Philip Leis that the division of labour among men and women among the Ijaw of the Niger Delta "rests more on the sharp delineation between techniques and the type of participation than on the exclusion of one sex from a particular occupation,"<sup>1</sup> there is a sharp division between the sexes in matters of divination. This is not unconnected with the idea in which spirit possession and mediumship are associated with femininity,<sup>2</sup> a situation which prevails also among the Ga people of South-eastern Ghana.<sup>3</sup>

Second, women in Epie-Atissa receive their call to become mediums sporadically. As a result, the various deities they serve deal with their mediums directly and also dictate the appropriate divinatory practice. In the circumstances, without the call, the esoteric knowledge associated with the art and secrets are not apparently handed on to successors. In fact, it was discovered during the field work in Epie-Atissa that owing to modernization, most children of mediums disassociate themselves from such practices in preference for good Christian upbringing and good education. Thus, openly, many may feel ashamed to be known and called diviners, but when pressed with crisis situations, they go secretly in search of diviners for their problems. Therefore likely that a number of the individual diviners die away with their art. But the art is easily passed on in the case of

communal divination as part of the tradition.

Third, the community does not accord any due recognition or protection to individual diviners. For this reason, any individual in the community may institute legal action against any individual diviner, especially if grieved. The diviner could then be sentenced, depending on the nature of the offence. For example, if an individual diviner pronounced someone in the community to have practised witchcraft, and if this ended in a legal action, the diviner will find it rather difficult to prove this in court. The sentence could therefore be severe, which could cause great embarrassment to the immediate members of the diviner's family and also to the profession. Therefore, in order to avoid this, a number of them seek recognition and protection from the government by having the business licensed. This is not the case with the communal types of divination because they are by tradition, already recognized by the community and therefore by government basically because of the secularity of Nigeria as a country since independence.<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, is the characteristic related to finance. Individual diviners see themselves as having a mission and therefore charge their clientele according to their standards. They control what they charge for whatever service rendered for their personal gains. They therefore see their profession in terms of business, hence the primary source of livelihood and affluence. The situation is therefore parallel to what occurs among the Ga where women "achieve financial

security",<sup>5</sup> and Ndembu diviners who also achieve "considerable wealth and influence".<sup>6</sup>

While there are various types of individual divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa, the most popular types that are dealt with here include: the oloko, 'law' divination at Ikolo; agba, 'mortar' divination also at Ikolo; Epie 'bottle', ololo divination at Kpansia; 'drinking glass', igilasi divination also at Kpansia; and idiama, 'looking glass' divination at Ogu. It should be noted that only one practitioner operates each kind, in a monopolistic way. No two practitioners operate in the same way with the same type of instrument.

### Oloko, 'Law' Divination

The practitioner of oloko, meaning 'law', because of the laws associated with this type of divination, which are binding on both parties, is an elderly woman, about 90 years old. She is called Madam Erekalayefa Tinbiri, at a village called Ikolo in Atissa clan, with an estimated population of 2000. She is the only practitioner of oloko divination in the whole clan, and has been divining for about 45 years. She is a widow with lots of grown up children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, but they refuse to be associated with her divinatory practice.





**PLATE 32** - Madam Erekalayefa  
Tinbiri, priestess of oloko divination demonstrating her divinatory instrument. Note the way one end of the string is tied to the big toe of her left foot, and the other end tied firmly to her left hand, and the okoko, 'marble' at the centre.

The divining materials are usually kept inside her shrine called ugula bekenowei, meaning, 'the shrine of the white man'. Already the meaning of ugula in Epie language has been known to mean 'shrine'; bekenowei means 'white man'. This would mean that her deity is called 'white man'. The oloko is brought out from the ugula only when it is time for divination. It comprises a string of about 12 inches long, and a 'marble', locally called okoko. This is a seed from a plant usually used by little children in playing games. It is not limestone in metamorphic crystalline state, used in sculpture and architecture. A hole is made through the centre of the 'marble' and the string put through it. The practitioner, Madam Erekalayefa then sits on a little stool, with one end of the string tied to the big toe of her left foot, and the other end tied firmly to her left hand. (See Plate 32). During the divinatory exercise, if the oloko remained suspended when pushed up the string, then the client is innocent; but if the oloko fell down, then the client is guilty. In other words, when it remained suspended, it was negative, but if it fell, then it was positive.

But we could not get her to give us a free demonstration of this during the interview. We had to come to her as her clients and be ready to pay the required fee. My colleague therefore accepted to be the client, and he had a strong reason for doing so. He had been told by the priestess of idiama, 'looking glass' divination at Ogu the previous day that someone was out to kill him. That the person had already planted charms in one of the corners in the new plot

of land he was developing to build a house. He therefore wanted to know if the oloko diviner would confirm it. Before commencing, he was asked to pay the consultation fee of N2.00 (two Naira), after which she began. She started first with some incantations, that were not audible, then said:

Oloko, tell me; there are no charms or evil medicines planted. There should be no deceit, no lies. No evil medicines were planted.

Having made this negative statement in a positive manner, she pushed the oloko up the string but it fell back, meaning it is positive. She made the statement again and pushed the oloko up one more time, and it still fell back. Then she asked the question in another way:

Oloko, so they have buried some charms. Have they buried some charms in this gentleman's plot?

Again the oloko fell back to the bottom, and this happened as many times as she asked the question. She therefore turned conclusively to the client and announced that without any doubt, they had actually planted some bad medicines in his plot of land. "The person who told you this earlier was right", she added. But the client still wanted to know if the person was male or female. The first diviner had suggested that it was male; a relative of the client. But *not knowing* what the previous person had said, she started



**PLATE 33** - Madam Erekalayefa's licence No. 84975 is displayed over her head, and the 'paddle', uvin, the symbol of her calling as medium, is held in her hands.



**PLATE 34** - This picture shows the asain, 'cultic clay pot', which serves as the receptacle for the oloko in the shrine. The hurricane Tamp provides light for the dark shrine even during the day.

to divine: "Is the person a woman?" This time the oloko remained suspended. Then she repeated the question three times, and on all occasions the oloko remained suspended. But when she asked oloko to tell her if the person was a male relative, it fell to the bottom. My colleague then became afraid, and asked to know how those bad medicines and charms could be eliminated and destroyed at once. He immediately became convinced that he needed help. In response, she instructed him to get ready as she was going to collect some herbs with which she would prepare a powerful potion to counteract those charms and medicines. But first, he must pay an extra N2.00 (two Naira) as initial deposit for the cost of workmanship. My colleague would have willingly paid and commissioned her to do the work, but he reluctantly changed his mind because he did not have any more money in his pocket. We however left there knowing that my colleague was very convinced that he needed help, and he might come back alone after having got the required amount.

This happened at Ikolo on Friday 16th August, 1985. She is not afraid to charge her clients because she is licensed and given a sign board, such as: "Erekalayefa Home 84975", but the date of this licence is not indicated on the board. Her symbol is the paddle (see Chapter 7, on related symbols). Her licence No. 84975, without the date, is visibly displayed on Plate 33 over her head, and the paddle in her hands. (Also see Plate 34, showing the asain, 'the powerful' clay pot which usually holds the oloko, in the shrine. The shrine is usually dark, so the hurricane lamp gives the light).

Madam Erekalayefa is of the opinion that for the past 45 years, she has been able to use her oloko divination to solve moral problems in the community. Her function therefore is in the solution of basic moral issues. For example, she said one of the most prevalent domestic squabbles between husbands and wives has been in the area of immorality. In this connection, husbands often accused their wives of infidelity, and wives also accused their husbands of always having affairs with other women, therefore constantly committing adultery. This has brought quarrels and misunderstandings between several families in the community. From time to time, however, such cases are brought to her, and through oloko divination, she is capable of detecting whether the woman had actually committed adultery or not. Whenever this happens, it is usually difficult for the person to deny the fact. By means of oloko, she reveals women who had had intercourse with their husbands while still in their menstrual periods; cases of stealing have also been settled by detecting the thieves.

By means of oloko, she is able to detect why certain women are barren and thus effect the cure. In such cases, wherever necessary, oloko directs her to the appropriate herbs applicable. Although she does not involve herself with detecting witchcraft practitioners, nonetheless she treats cases such as illnesses inflicted on people by means of witchcraft. Many have been delivered this way, but this has angered the witches who have teamed up against her to destroy

her work. They do this by dropping different kinds of charms on her doorstep. They have often times cut off chunks of wood from her wooden door posts, and used them against her and her business. She thinks they have somewhat been able to destroy her hand work because she is no longer being patronized as she used to be. Otherwise people came from various parts of the country to be treated by her. This made her popular and successful. She has been able to build two solid mud buildings, roofed with corrugated iron sheets, by means of oloko divination.

#### **Agba, 'Mortar' Divination**

Agba, 'mortar' divination was practised by a lady called Ina who died some years ago. Although the art is not practised by any other person, people in Ikolo community remember her very well. The informant was Mr. Ben Dick Ogbu, a middle-aged gentleman, who was once a wrestling champion in the community. His story was corroborated by Chief J.T. Fafaa, the obeneken, 'village head' of Ikolo who is a dynamic leader.

According to their report, the agba divination consisted of one item only, namely a little agba or 'mortar', a wooden vessel carefully carved, such that the hollow part of it is used in pounding ingredients with a pestle. This was however designed for divination only. The practitioner placed it on her head, and if it fell, then the client was either guilty

or what he came to enquire about was positive. But if it remained without falling, the client was either innocent or the matter enquired about was negative. Like the oloko, the agba was also consulted for whatever reason, on the payment of token fees.

Chief Fafaa mentioned that the consultation fee ranged from 3 pence to 6 pence, and up to one shilling in the early 1940s, depending on the seriousness of the problem. Close relatives of the practitioner were not normally charged but were asked to fulfil the formality by bringing even a little thatch removed from the thatched roof of the practitioner's residence. Since each of these diviners, the oloko and the agba, had their personal deities, this act was simply to inform the practitioner's deity that the client was a relation.

#### Idiama, 'Looking Glass' Divination at Ogu

Another type of divination practised in the area is called idiama, 'looking glass' divination. The practitioner is also an elderly woman, about 85 years old, blind in both eyes, called Madam Zikumona. She comes from a village called Ogu, with a population of about 2500. She is a widow with some grown up children and grandchildren. Her late husband was an Anglican church leader before he died; so both actually attended the Anglican Church until she was called to abandon



Christianity in order to become priestess of the deity called Ekine. Now all members of her father's family are worshippers of one deity or the other. The Anglican Church in the village has virtually closed down, as is the case at both Akaba, as well as at Swali, giving way to the worship of various deities. There is virtually no church at all at Famgbe at the moment.

With the help of Chief Marla Abasi, the highly respected obene-eken, 'village head', of Ogu, Madam Zikumona was interviewed on Wednesday, 14th August, 1985, in her residence in connection with idiama, 'looking glass' divination. Asked why she could make use of an ordinary mirror or looking glass, for divining, she replied that many people have given her looking glasses, but the one she uses for divination is specially blessed by the gods. The looking glass itself speaks to her, her blindness notwithstanding. Although she is totally blind, she is not deaf. Narrating how it works, she said the client has to pay the consultation fee. When the money is produced, which is only two Naira as was the case with Madam Erekalayefa of Ikolo, . . . the client ~~then~~ speaks about his problem to the money held in his hand. She then covers this money with her divining idiama, and the answer comes out almost without delay. This has made her popular and people come from far and near to consult her. The particular looking glass she uses is a little portable face mirror which any woman may conveniently carry about in her handbag. She said she was consulted about Chief Macauley Saife, the obene-eken of Onopa. They brought drinks and

money, but she told them that the chief will not recover; he will surely die. She therefore refused to accept their drinks, except the consultation fee. (See Chapter 2, pp.94ff).

At the time of the interview, somebody had already paid his consultation fee, and the process of divination was about to begin. But he wanted to have it done very confidentially, and as privately as possible. He apparently had serious problems. But in order to allow us to see how it works, she gave us the consultation fee in her possession, and asked that any one of us may speak to the money about any particular problem, and the answer will come. Therefore, this writer's companion, a former Air Force officer, spoke, saying: "Tell me what you know about me."

Having said this, he gave back the money, which she put on the floor and covered it with the mirror. She then said:

Some people are here to try you. Odum, Ekine, please I beg you. Let all be well. The money belongs to someone else; that is true. It is not his money. But be merciful. Respond to him in your usual language. Whether it was given with the left or the right, it is the same. There is nothing different. O Izibe, 'God', bring your power. Here is an examination.

Having made her prayer and incantations, she kept silent and attentive for the answer. She turned the glass over, held it, and put it down again. Then she began to speak:

It said, you are going to work. You pray to your Izibe and the idiomu in your family that they should come to your aid. You are owing Izibe thanks for the work he gave you. If it is a lie, say so; here, in this place, that is how things are done.

After saying this, she took a short breath, waited for a while as if listening very attentively to what someone was telling her, then she continued:

It said, the deity from your town is standing here. Its name is called Ovun. It is standing here. Do you not know that Izibe is the creator of deities? You spoke, made the promise, but failed to supply the drinks. But a child shall die in your house. Your name has become too popular, so a child shall die. People are calling your name too much. The work you are doing has made you too popular, and people are calling on your name too much. That which is a lie, say it is a lie. What you have done, say you have done.

There was a short break. She listened more attentively, took her breath, then she continued as follows:

It said, you may not grow old. You will soon die. It said you fell sick some time ago; you almost died. Izibe forgave you then. You should pray in the name of Izibe in your house. Somebody has planted some charms and evil medicines in your house. You have a block building. Who quarrelled with you? If no one quarrelled with you, say so. Pray for yourself in the name of Izibe, 'God'.

Here again she paused for a while, and listened more attentively for further revelations. After she had done so, then she continued:

It said someone had died in your town. He killed his brother by way of car accident. The brother died in a car accident. This same person is looking for you. He wants you to have a car accident. And how many children have you had with your wife?

There was a pause again here. It was as though the message was so much that she had lost track of it and wanted to find her way. The period of silence became so lengthy that the obene-ken, 'village head', had to ask if she was still speaking. She responded by asking to know if anyone was writing down all what she had been saying. The chief told her no-one was writing; rather we were expecting to hear some more if she was ready. Then she continued:

It said you stole someone else's money as your consultation fee.

This sounded amusing so all of us laughed. The chief then responded that he did not steal because it was an agreement; "So you do not have to change your mind. We already knew the money belonged to someone else. But this is an examination."

Having thus responded, she remained silent for some more time, and said:

It said you are trying to know its secrets.  
It said it is idongo; seibiri is here;<sup>8</sup>  
ekine is here; orutamuno is also here.  
But this man will not live to an old age. He will  
not live to an old age; he will not live to an old  
age.

She seemed to have lost her track again. Either that or she  
was receiving from various sources therefore causing her to  
be confused somewhat. But when she came to herself, she  
began talking about the chief himself; thus:

You Marla, people are calling you too much. Someone  
close to you has sold you away. You will soon die.  
You go into every place, not caring whether charms  
and evil medicines are placed there. It said you  
are always experiencing headache; it moves from  
your legs into the stomach and then into the head.  
If this is a lie, say it is.

As she was still continuing, the chief asked to know whether  
she was referring to him. He then asked her to go ahead  
because this was an examination only. She then went back to  
the problem of my companion, the former air force officer and  
said:

Someone wants to kill you with charms and evil  
medicines.

The chief then asked to know what the remedy would be, and

**PLATE 35** - Mrs. Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi divination at Kpansia, fully dressed, with the little drinking glass in her hand filled with kaikai, ready for divination.



**PLATE 36** - Igilasi divination shrine.



she said, let him pray because he goes to church. She further emphasised that someone was after his life and wanted to know who was quarrelling with him about a plot of land. She said further that he has bad luck, hence if he lent money, it was never refunded.

### Igilasi, 'Drinking Glass' Divination at Kpansia

The ~~fourth~~ type of divination is the igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination which is located at Kpansia, a village with a population of about 3600 inhabitants, in Epie clan. Thus far, all the other types of divination discussed are within Atissa clan. The practitioner is Mrs. Better Wilson, married with six children, and about 38 years old.

Better Wilson's instrument for this divination is the drinking glass, known in Epie dialect as igilasi, filled with kaikai, locally brewed hot drink. (See Plate 35, where she is fully dressed for action in her shrine, with the igilasi in her right hand). She is priestess of a personal deity called alaboingeribo, a water deity, to whom she is also married. She therefore has a natural husband as well as a spirit-husband.

The drinking glass specially designed or ritually blessed for divination always remains in her shrine, when not in use. (See Plate 36, for the drinking glass divination shrine). Close to the shrine is a chair on which she sits when



**PLATE 37** - Better Wilson in sitting position in her shrine.



divining. It is so close to the shrine that she could sit on it, and look into the glass in the shrine, or when actually possessed, she may stand up, holding the glass in her hand (See Plate 37; Better in sitting position).

Before beginning with any divination exercise, she gets possessed by the deity, and it is after being possessed, that she receives illumination and revelation concerning the client's problem. The little glass containing the kaikai acts as the screen through which the revelations come. But after she is dispossessed, she no longer sees or receives any revelation from the glass.

An interview with her was arranged on Thursday, 14th February, 1985. Initially, audience with her was refused, but later granted after the payment of two bottles of kaikai and one bottle of Fanta orange. Shoes and hats cannot be worn by clients in the shrine so these were removed. She then took her seat, rang a little bell near the shrine, and said:

Alabo-ngeribo, alabo-ngeribo, alabo-ngeribo, some people have come into this house. They have come to take photographs of your wife. I have told them earlier that you did not allow it. But they have brought their drinks. They have brought only hot drink of kaikai. They are yet to bring a bottle of soft drink. Once this is brought, they should be allowed.

It was after all this that the exercise of examining the shrine, taking photographs and asking a few questions began. Even as the exercise was going on, some clients had assembled

outside, waiting to take their turns to consult with her. But in spite of all further persuasions, she would not allow anyone to be present when she does her business with her clients. She herself, as well as the clients, prefer to keep everything done in strict confidence. It was therefore not easy to penetrate into her 'iron-curtain', or to find someone who had benefitted from previous contacts with her. But on Saturday, 2nd November, 1985, Mr. Claud Yakiah, a native of Yenagoa, petty trader, gave an account of his visit to Better Wilson, in May 1981.

This was in connection with his wife who was overdue for delivery, being pregnant for several months. He was charged the consultation fee of one Naira, which is half of what the two older women charge. He also gave a bottle of kaikai. Then she looked into the little glass filled with kaikai, and said his wife's womb was tied by witches to the effect that she may have great trouble delivering safely. The only remedy was to loose the womb immediately.

In order to complete the process, he was asked to buy a male lizard, which he did for 50 kobo; that is about five shillings. He held the lizard by himself, but on their way to the bush where the ritual was to be performed, the lizard died, so he bought another one. The lizard represented the scape-goat which was used for sacrifice. They also had a little mat, which represented the coffin meant for his wife. The lizard used here corresponds with that used earlier for Chief Saife. During the ritual, drink offering of kaikai was

poured to the deity and she made a statement to the effect that the pregnant woman had been loosed from the bonds of the witches. She could therefore, now deliver safely. His wife delivered that same week to a boy.

The main function of igilasi divination would seem therefore to have been in the area of healing. People who are sick consult her to know the cause or causes of their sickness, and also the remedy. She deals with both because while possessed, the deity directs her to the cause, and for the cure, to the appropriate herbs. If it is not related to the use of herbs, then appropriate sacrifices are offered for appeasement, which may include: sugar, corned beef, eggs, soft drinks and rice. The language of divination is always Epie. But when possessed, she may speak Ibo, Kalabari, and other languages which she had never learnt. She forgets them all when not possessed. This was confirmed by her natural husband, Mr. Wilson.

When possessed, she sometimes behaves abnormally, such as attempting to destroy currency money in her possession. Her husband thinks she looks strange and sounds funny when she speaks in strange tongues. But she hardly remembers a thing when no longer possessed. Even then, Better herself thinks the deity has made her prosperous through igilasi divination, because she has since built two block buildings..



**PLATE 38** - Prophet Orioko Dangolo, priest of Epie bottle divination standing by his signboard with one of his wives. His licence no. 357462 also authorises him to operate a 'Healing Home' as herbalist. Compare this with Plate 33.

Epie Bottle, 'Ololo' Divination at Kpansia

All the practitioners of all the previous cases dealt with, such as: the oloko divination, agba divination, igilasi divination, and the idiama divination, are women. The practitioners of oloko and idiama are very old; that of igilasi is still a young, middle-aged, married lady, and that of agba has already died. And in all cases, they operate alone without any hope of a successor, because they act as mediums to their individual deities.

But the case of Epie bottle or ololo divination is different. The practitioner is male, called 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo, about 53 years old. He has little or no education, but he is remarkably intelligent, and expressed himself with great confidence. He does not operate alone; he does not seem to act as medium to any deity, but holds the Bible and has many men and women as his disciples. He is located at the village of Kpansia, his place of birth. Thus while Mrs. Better Wilson operates her 'igilasi divination', or isini-pulem-igilasi, at one end of the village, 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo also operates his 'bottle divination', isini-pulem-ololo, from the other end of the same village. His signboard is conspicuously displayed on the main road, as an advertisement. (See Plate 38, showing the signboard, with the 'Prophet' standing on one end, and one of his wives, on the other end). He established the Epie bottle divination in 1976, and as indicated on the signboard, it is actually a

'Healing Home', with the Government registration No. 357462. This corresponds with Erekalayefa's registration No. 84975, indicated on p.197, in Plate 33. The only difference is that the word, 'Healing' is omitted in the latter case, but probably implied. But in the present case, the signboard clearly indicates that he also 'heals' with roots and herbs. This places him in the category of a 'herbalist', locally called onyo-obu or 'native doctor'.

This being the case, it would therefore mean that 'Prophet' Dangolo is most probably a medium because as will be seen in Chapter 6, below, the ritual calling of the various diviners-priests in Epie-Atissa, is always associated with the medium being bestowed with the gift of the knowledge of the use of roots and herbs, and/or becoming "deeply engaged in epistemological issues".<sup>9</sup> For example, as indicated on p.198, Erekalayefa of Ikolo, medium of Bekenowei combines her gift in oloko divination with the use of roots and herbs in bringing about final solutions to the problems of some of her clients. In this respect, the title 'herbalist', or onyo-obu is applicable to both Dangolo and Erekalayefa. It also brings them in line with what is standard practice in the case of Ifa priests, called babalawo, who are required by tradition to "acquire a vast amount of herbal and pharmaceutical lore with its accompanying repertoire of charms and incantations".<sup>10</sup> Among the Ibos, the herbalist or dibia, in addition to his knowledge of curative roots and leaves, also makes "charms even including ajo ogwu ('bad medicine', i.e. for harming others)".<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, to the

Ibos, the dibia is a herbalist, diviner, fortune teller, and could also be "a witch-doctor",<sup>12</sup> etc.

Thus with particular reference to 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo, the title of 'Prophet', and the 'Bible' held in his hands in Plate 38, may probably correspond with 'the Bible' and 'the white man's cross' recorded for use for the healing of Chief Macauley Saife, in the Shrine of Orisa at Akaba, as already discussed. Nonetheless, the use of roots and herbs for healing by Dangolo, only supplements his other and probably more lucrative assignment of "Looking into Epie-Bottle for your Future Troubles", as advertised. The artistic drawing of the 'bottle', ololo and the candle, on the signboard emphasizes the fact. Here 'troubles' would appeal to people who are suffering from poverty, disease, constant children mortality, witch-craft and other related problems. Those who come are encouraged to enrol as members of the cult, with the sum of N10 (ten Naira).

Describing what follows after this, 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo, who was interviewed on 23rd March, 1985, said, a bottle is positioned on a table and a candle lit in front of it. The client then sits and looks concentratedly at the 'bottle', ololo, from the opposite direction of the burning candle. Before doing so, the client drinks a very concentrated dose of a mixture, the substance of which the 'Prophet' calls 'flour'. It is mandatory for all his clients to drink this mixture. According to the 'Prophet', the 'flour' is not obtained in Nigeria but sent to him from Britain through some



**PLATE 39** - Clients of Epie-Bottle seriously and laboriously consulting the 'Bottle'. Note the amount of serious concentration involved.



middle men. (See Plate 39 showing some of his clients 'consulting' the Epie-Bottle. Note the amount of serious concentration involved). The 'Prophet' sets up the materials and some people spend days looking intently at the ololo before them, hoping it would be the means by which solutions to their problems would be made manifest.

According to some of the clients, whose views will be treated later (see below, Chapter 4. pp.279-282) the answers to the problems for which the person came may finally be displayed like a television screen, in the bottle, after a long, concentrated look at the bottle. But in order to get to that stage, people must drink enough of that 'flour' mixture; the greater the quantity, the better. Thus if someone reported missing an important item, it is believed that by looking at the bottle, the 'good spirits' are asked to bring into focus, those evil spirits that caused the man to steal. The evil spirits would then bring the person who stole and also, the stolen item. If the thief came from a different town or village, then his particulars, such as his name and address, will all appear for easy identification. The client could simply copy the information from the bottle, and take any other appropriate action to recover his missing property.

In spite of his genuine intentions to help the people overcome their problems, it has been discovered that he has committed much havoc in the process. This is because several people have died of overdose of his 'flour' from Britain. Others have become lunatic after drinking the stuff; and

others continue to hallucinate and see things. It has also caused sleeplessness for both adults and children who were given the stuff. In order to be absolutely certain about the chemical contents of the so-called 'flour', some quantity was procured through one of the devotees for chemical analysis by experts in the Department of Chemistry, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The result came out on 12th April, 1985, in which it was confirmed that 'the flour from Britain', which Prophet Orioko Dangolo administered to his Epie-Bottle Divination clients was indeed, nothing other than lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).<sup>13</sup> A copy of the detailed report is attached in Appendix I. He is therefore consciously or unconsciously creating a generation of drug addicts, thereby introducing an element that has hitherto been completely alien to the culture in Epie-Atissa, and in most parts of the Niger Delta.

### CONCLUSION

It could be seen from what has been described in this chapter that there are obvious differences between communal divination in Epie-Atissa which was described in the previous chapter, and individual divination. The first difference is in connection with the emphasis on rituals. In communal divination, the priest and his cultic personnel are traditionally and specifically trained in the performance of several rituals since they were connected with the need to worship and venerate the various deities. The communal

deities, are believed to be more powerful than the individual ones. Thus the consequences of offending such deities would be more catastrophic to the entire community. Similarly, as long as things are all right, the whole community benefitted. The various rituals were therefore necessary to keep this bond of peace. Therefore certain divinatory exercises could not begin until necessary rituals have been performed.

But this is not the case with regard to the individual divinatory practices. Both Mrs. Zikumona Adegbesi, priestess of Idiama divination and Mrs. Erekalayefa Tinbiri, oloko divination, respectively, are more concerned about the payment of the consultation fee of two Naira by their clients than anything else. Once this was paid, they went immediately into the process of divining. This is the case with all the rest. They all pay greater attention to the payment of consultation fees and the immediate solution of the client's problems than rituals.

The second difference between the communal and individual divination is what could be regarded as the gender problem. No woman in Epie-Atissa is allowed to perform a priestly role in communal shrines, but on their own. Many would see this as evidence of the extent to which women have been marginalized in that society. They may be good enough in Epie-Atissa society to marry and produce children, till the ground and produce plenty of food, be involved in taking care of the home, but completely banned from participating in certain communal affairs, such as 'divination', isini-pulem. Eleanor

Burke Leacock calls this "the masculinity complex and the feminine mystique",<sup>14</sup> which also exists in capitalist societies. In her view, this is so serious that she thinks the full liberation of women is "inseparably linked to the emancipation of men".<sup>15</sup> That is, men are behaving the way they do because they too are bound. Hence according to Paulette Bethel-Daly of the Bahamas, "men are tolerant but not fully accepting of us as professionals on their level. Our most serious problem is being recognised in our respective fields".<sup>16</sup> Commenting about the extent to which women's inequality has been receiving attention at the United Nations, LaMarr Renee regretted that the situation is global, and is therefore not necessarily restricted to Epie-Atissa only. In her view, in spite of all the various amounts of work women do both outside the home and within the home, they only receive "one tenth of the world's income for work which is rarely noticed, valued or paid".<sup>17</sup> The United Nation's report on the state of the world's women indicated that a number of things are responsible for women's inequality in a world that is highly dominated by men. The most important aspect being, "the restrictive nature of women's domestic responsibilities, inhibiting opportunity to pursue an education, follow a career, or enter into political activity".<sup>18</sup> It is being perceived that the problem is not getting better but grimmer, especially in Epie-Atissa where even the 'gods', idionu are in favour of women's inequality".

The main function of individual type of divination is to establish the cause or causes of people's problems and to

prescribe appropriate solutions. It therefore performs a general-purpose function, as against the communal divination which performs the specific function of the death-divination. Herbs are used during prescriptions for healing. Thus some of the diviners, such as Better Wilson, Erekalayefa Tinbiri and Prophet Orioko Dangolo could also be regarded as herbalists. This is necessary because they gain more financially by being able to effect the cure, and not by merely being diviners.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Philip E. Leis, 'Ijaw Enculturation: A Re-examination of the Early Learning Hypothesis', South Western Journal of Anthropology, 20 (1964), pp.34.
2. cf. I.M. Lewis, 'Spirit Possession and Deprivation Cults', Man, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, N.S. 1 (1966), pp.307-327; also Peter J. Wilson 'Status Ambiguity and Spirit Possession', Man, N.S. 2, (1967), pp.366-378.
3. Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religion', Journal of Religion in Africa, 4 (1971/72), p.171.
4. See William D.G. Hunter, 'Osun - Mystical Goddess of Yorubaland', in M. Azar and M.W. Fattal (eds), Alminbar Tribune (Paris: 1986), p.16.
5. Marion Kilson, op. cit., p.177.
6. Victor W. Turner, Ndembu Divination, op. cit., p.51.
7. Evan M. Zuesse, 'Divination and Deity in African Religions', op. cit., p.160.
8. All these are the names of some of the deities in the area which the diviner was acknowledging as an expression of her esoteric knowledge. It is unfortunate that all the photographs which were taken during the interview with Mrs. Zikumona Adegbesi went bad, hence there are no photographs.
9. Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religion', Journal of Religion in Africa (1971/72), 4, p.176.
10. cf. E.M. McClelland, op. cit., p.86.
11. Francis A. Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, op. cit., p.63.
12. Idem.

13. For the evil effects of LSD, a hallucinogenic drug producing marked alterations of behaviour in the addicts, see Cecil Helman, Culture, Health and Illness (London: Wright Publishing Inc. (1984), pp.111-115.

14. cf. Eleanor Burke Leacock, 'Introduction', in Heleith I.B. Saffioti, Women in Class Society, trans. by Michael Vale (London: Monthly Review Press, 1978), p.X.

15. Ibid., p.X.

16. LaMarr Renee, 'Women on the Home Front', West Africa (London: West Africa Publishing Co. Ltd., 18 January, 1988), pp.78-79.

17. Ibid., p.78.

18. Idem.

## CHAPTER 4

### DIVINATION CULTS AND THEIR CLIENTELE IN EPIE-ATISSA

The practice of divination in Epie-Atissa attracts *a varied* clientele, both within Epie-Atissa and also from other parts of Nigeria. In addition to the main communal idiomu in the area, Utoken people go to several other 'shrines', ugula for a variety of reasons. In order to gain access and have their needs met, they are required to make certain payments. But anyone wishing to investigate the reasons for which clients visit the various cultic places in Epie-Atissa is bound to come up against a number of difficulties. First, as earlier indicated in connection with Mrs. Zikumona Adegbesi, priestess of 'looking glass divination' (see above, Chapter 3. pp.201f), and ~~with~~ Better Wilson's igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination' (see above, Chapter 3, pp.208f), both the clients and the practitioners prefer that their transactions be kept as confidential as possible. This therefore rules out the possibility of participant observation. Secondly, as already seen at Famgbe and especially at Swali, the cultic priests and the devotees regarded it as 'taboo', isini-agugulu, to allow 'a foreigner', onyo-ikiya, literally meaning, 'stranger', or 'non-cultic member', free access into ~~the~~ *their* cultic secrets (see above, Chapter 2, p.143). It is a norm in this as in other cultic societies to carefully safeguard their secrets. Such access may be granted only after the 'deities', idiomu



had granted permission. But this is not always possible. Finally, for one to be able to have a breakthrough, and be able to collect all the needed data, it would take far more time than was available.

But, while the fieldwork was in progress, it was discovered that Mr. Japan Anyasara, Secretary of <sup>the</sup> Orisa cult at Akaba, maintained some records of those who had consulted the diviners at Orisa shrine from 1983. The records indicated such details as the name and address of the client, the purpose of consultation and amount paid for consultation, and after the process of divination, the prescription or recommendation as divine solution to the problem, and the actual amount charged. It should be noted that the cost of treatment is different from the consultation fee. Following some discussion with the priests, the secretary and other devotees, the records were made available just for a few days. Thus, from these records, which date from 9th February, 1983, through 7 February, 1986, it was discovered that 218 clients visited the Shrine of Orisa at Akaba for various reasons. Some relevant information was gathered elsewhere as well, such as the Aruku-eken cult at Famgbe, and the Epie-Bottle cult at Kpansia. These will be discussed as supplementary data to those of Orisa.

#### Clientele at Orisa Divinatory Shrine 'Ugula'

Since people go to Orisa with their problems from various

parts of the country, each person pays a general consultation fee. They are then charged some additional fees, depending on the magnitude of the problem. In some cases, the individuals concerned make promises or vows, during which they may make part payments, hoping to pay the balance after the problem has been solved. At first no records were kept, so this brought about some confusion during payment. This was because since they dealt with several cases, it was no longer possible to remember each case, including the charges, especially the amount paid and the balance, from memory. It therefore became necessary that some records should be kept. As a result, they appointed a secretary, in the person of Japan Anyansara, to keep a record of everything that transpired between the client and Orisa in the ugula. If the client forgets or refuses to pay, after having his or her needs met, it is the duty of Orisa to press for payment. If he failed, violent and destructive actions are taken against such a person until payments are made. In certain cases, such violent actions might lead to the client's child becoming very ill. Then, as usual, he might go somewhere else for consultation. There, he would be reminded to return to Akaba and pay all that he owed. At his arrival, the records will tell him what he owed, and there would be no argument. He has to pay, or else his child may surely die.

It is therefore the duty of the Secretary to maintain proper records, in order to make it easy for payment by the clients, and also for the priests to remember what Orisa

prescribed for particular problems. The register has therefore become an important historical document for the village of Akaba, in matters connected with their most important idiomu, called Orisa.

Mr. Japan Anyansara, the Secretary, started taking records for Orisa on a voluntary basis, specifically from 9th February, 1983.<sup>1</sup> Educationally, he attended St. Peter's School, Yenagoa, where he completed his primary school education in 1962. Then after a long time of unemployment, he finally got admitted at the Technical Vocational School of Agriculture, at Yenagoa, in 1984, and he is working in the Ministry of Agriculture at the moment. He previously attended the Anglican Church, and was baptized in 1958. He knows about God, and can still be disposed to discuss *the Bible* freely with Christians. He has two wives and some children, and all his wives have their individual idiomu which they serve.

The records were sketchy when he first began on 9th February, 1983. This was partly caused by the fact that he has only primary school education, and partly because it was a pioneering endeavour in which he had had no formal training. Nevertheless, it is the only record of any kind pertaining to divination with its related transactions presently current and available in the entire area of Epie-Atissa. Thus this has made these records, which clearly show the names and addresses of clients, in terms of their villages, purpose of consultation, amount paid in the

form of consultation fees, additional charges, annual dues paid, with drinks, related prescriptions, etc., very precious.

Other additional information in these records include such details as the promises or vows made, the amount paid and the balance payable after the needs have been met. In order not to provoke the wrath of Orisa, those who failed to redeem their pledges owing to unforeseen circumstances, quickly made sure to go there and explain themselves. In that way, misunderstandings were avoided and Orisa would not be held responsible for any calamity that occurred in that family. The Secretary also maintained another register from 1st March, 1984, in which the names of clients, their villages, the prescriptions for their problems, and the amount of money charged for work done, were indicated. In his opinion, the first one was the main register, and the second one was only supplementary. This main register has therefore been carefully examined in order to determine the types of persons who visited ~~the shrine~~<sup>the shrine</sup> in terms of their occupations, the reasons for their consultations with Orisa, and the amount paid. Some of the data have been set out in Tables 1-5.

#### Consultations at the Ugula of Orisa

The records indicated that 'divinatory consultations', isini-pulem, took place at the 'shrine', ugula of Orisa on

an average of at least once a week. Thus there could be as many as four meetings or more in a month. Up to 10 persons could be individually interviewed, and consultations held with them in one day. As a normal requirement, each person had to pay a consultation fee of N2 or £1, together with a bottle of kaikai. The days of consultation could be any day of the week, except on Sundays, principally because many of the church goers who patronize such shrines avoid going there on Sundays. It is a day of rest therefore, both to the clientele and also to the diviners, some of whom were Christians before becoming diviners.

After a very careful examination two hundred and eighteen names were extracted from the register of which 76 were men, 142 were women. A break down by occupation shows that of the 76 men recorded, 49 were farmers, 15 were traders, 2 were teachers, and 7 were factory workers and civil servants. Others include one obeneken, 'village head', one landlord, and one unemployed person. The problems presented by the men covered 15 general areas. By far the most prominent was the need for protection, followed by the need for Orisa to help them eliminate, by killing all their enemies within a given period. This is followed by the need for healing the sick ones in the family, and for the barren women to have children.

Equally prominent was the need for Orisa to interpret bad dreams which certain persons had dreamt and were afraid of the consequences. Closely related to this was the need for

Orisa to explain the meanings of certain 'omens', commonly known as isini-kanna. Some parents were concerned about their children who were taking examinations; workers also went to ask Orisa to help with their promotion, and to help stabilize them on their jobs, so as to avoid being retrenched. Traders who had lost some of their items wanted Orisa to help them recover such stolen items, by causing serious calamities in the homes of the thieves until the items were surrendered, and their sins confessed. Husbands with pregnant wives went to plead that their wives should have safe deliveries, and that miscarriage should be over-ruled. The unemployed went to solicit the help of Orisa for gainful employment. The landlord whose tenants were not paying their rents thought he had bad luck, and wanted it reversed. Those who were experiencing the interference of the 'evil ones' commonly called, igbani-ikio-dieli, literally meaning, 'people of evil heart', in their building projects went to have their lives insured with Orisa, and to help them complete what they had set out to do. It was generally felt that building projects in Epie-Atissa aroused jealousy, and unless great care was exercised the builder may not live to complete it, and if he did, die prematurely. Some did not have enough money and thus went to ask if Orisa could help with such financial provision. Finally, there were some men who did not know how to handle money. They always had reasons to spend, but never saving. They too wanted Orisa to help so that they could be able to save.

Thus the enquiries were mainly personal, and everybody went

there for the purpose of having his or her individual needs met. These are the general and not the more specific, post-mortem type of need which is specifically handled by aganaga divination. This corresponds with the practice of some of her neighbours in the Niger Delta, such as the Urhobos to the West of the Niger, who consult the Oboepha;<sup>2</sup> or the Kalabari, to the East who also consult the Adum, 'python' or 'snake cult', at a place called Adumama, 'python or snake-town',<sup>3</sup> for similar reasons.

For example, on the 9th March, 1984, someone from the nearby village of Famgbe went and reported that his sister had just died. And as a result of the expensive burial, he was short of cash. Therefore, instead of a sheep which he had promised to bring earlier, he had come to bring money instead. He also pleaded with Orisa that several people in the family were sick; and that for three months, his son had been stooling blood. He therefore needed protection and paid the sum of four Naira. Then after the necessary processes of divination with the ugbolo, the response from Orisa was:

I do not agree to receive money. You must bring sheep as earlier agreed. You must bring this sheep within 20 days from today. After you have done this, then we shall talk.

This seems to be a very unsympathetic response, in view of the enquirer's pathetic situation. But if that was the view

of the idionu, then an enquirer cannot stand against it, for fear of the consequences. Hence for a man in the circumstances just described to provide a sheep within the time limit given, is like adding more sorrows to his already sorrowful situation. But none of the men queried this aspect of Orisa. But this was not the case with the women (see below, pp.255-257).

Of all the men who visited and consulted with Orisa during the period under review, the visit of the obeneken of Ogu, seems most remarkable. He is Chief Anthony Marla Joel Abasi, who was 45 years old. He holds B.Sc. (Hons.) in Economics, University of Ife (1972), and M.Sc. Econs., University of Ghana, Legon (1975). He held responsible positions in the Rivers State Civil Service, as Inspector of Taxes, Ministry of Finance (1972-76); Principal Inspector of Taxes (1977-1980); Deputy Director of Scholarships (Accounts), Rivers State (1980); and Deputy Director of Budget and Head of Revenue Inspectorate (1980-1983).

He was appointed obeneken in 1978, after the death of his father in 1976. He is married, with one wife, and has eight children, six boys and two girls. He is perhaps the only obeneken in Epie-Atissa clans who has only one wife. He is also by far the most educated of all the obenekens in the area. He was very interested in the research and did everything possible to ensure that the diviners and cultic members at Ogu co-operated fully with the fieldwork that was conducted there. In certain cases, he personally led the





**PLATE 40** - Chief Marla Abasi,  
Obeneken of Ogu in his traditional  
regalia.

research team to the appropriate resident, introduced the issue, then departed while the interview continued. (See Plate 40, in which Chief Marla Abasi poses in his regalia).

He was warned by <sup>an</sup>Idiama divination practitioner on 14th August, 1985, concerning his life (see above p.206). This was two weeks after the death of Chief Macauley Saife, his colleague and friend, on 1st August, 1985. He went to Orisa two months later, on 26th October, 1985, reporting sick and wanted to know the cause.

The response from Orisa about this enquiry is not stated. But the fact that a man of such academic status and rank in society, went to consult with Orisa concerning his illness, does show that divination has become an important cultural phenomenon in Epie-Atissa. Obviously, both Chief Macauley Saife, Obeneken of Onopa, and Chief Marla Abasi, Obeneken of Ogu were regular clients of Orisa.

This is supported by the fact that on 30th July, 1985, Bacin, Chief Saife's sister went to Orisa to express her disappointment at the death of Chief Saife and to ask Orisa to explain why he died, in spite of all they have paid for the protection of the family. The chief and his family were therefore under the protective covering of Orisa long before his death.

Another very important traditional ruler in Epie-Atissa, whose name occurs in Orisa's register at Akaba, is Chief

B.L.W. Mabinton, the ebenibe, 'clan head', of Atissa clan. Chief Mabinton became the ebenibe of Atissa after the civil war in Nigeria which lasted from 1967-70. Before then, he was a wealthy tin miner in the Plateau area near Jos, Northern Nigeria, where he established himself among the influential Hausas. He later went into politics and became a member of the Federal House of Representatives, in Lagos, but lost it before the Civil War. As a southerner, he was one of those who lost almost all his properties and investments in the North, but managed to return safely to Yenebebeli, his paternal home near Yenagoa, in order to start life all over again. He has since been able to establish himself in a number of business ventures, especially in the fisheries. As one of his ventures, he bought over from the government an oil mill factory at Yenagoa, for the purpose of establishing himself as well, in the area of palm oil and palm kernel produce.<sup>4</sup> But the prospects of this business were seriously undermined by the oil boom in Nigeria, which lured away farmers who formerly dealt in palm produce, to the townships, especially to Port Harcourt, Nigeria's oil capital, for white collar jobs. As a result, he could no longer make the anticipated profits and eventually found it difficult to pay the few workers who were employed in this factory. Some worked for a period of eight months without any salary. At last, the night watch man in this factory lost his patience and went to Orisa on 30th October, 1985, to seek for divine help to recover his salary that was outstanding. In this respect, Orisa corresponds in function to the influential and powerful Ekpe

secret society among the Efiks in the South Eastern state, which is also used by members "for the recovery of debts."<sup>5</sup>

I came to sue Chief B.L.W. Mabinton before you. I am his night watch man at his oil mill factory at Yenagoa. But he is owing me the sum of N640.00 (six hundred and forty Naira) which is my salary for 8 months. Let him pay me or make serious trouble with him.

Having said this, the man paid N40.00 (forty Naira) to Orisa, which probably comprised ~~the~~ consultation fee, and other related charges. Again the supplementary record does not indicate what was the response of Orisa to this enquiry. But the intention was that Orisa should make life very difficult for the ebenibe of Atissa, until the salary owed was paid. This would mean causing serious calamities in his family which could mean the death of any member of his family, such as his wives, children and grandchildren. There was a time when two of his wives were killed in a car accident on the same spot, and on the same day, as they travelled together on a business trip. He has also lost a good number of his sons and daughters, some by car accidents, and others through minor illnesses. He is now about 70 years old or more, one of the leading figures in the Ogboni cult, in the Rivers State, and perhaps in Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> It is probable that he became a member of this cult for the purpose of protection and other social reasons. It is also possible that having heard that his name had been tabled before Orisa by one of his employees he would

immediately opt for an amicable settlement. As the ebenibe, 'clan head' of the whole clan, he is not ignorant of the consequences in matters related to 'divinities', idiomu, in the area.

Thus, as indicated in Appendix II, the need for protection occurred thirty-three times, which was the highest occurrence of all. This shows that apart from the basic physiological needs of food and shelter, the need for protection against the unknown constitutes one of the greatest needs of people in Epie-Atissa. Since almost all unfortunate circumstances are explained in terms of malevolent forces, with particular reference to 'witchcraft', igbani-ida, those who hold such beliefs do not only seek for protection, but also

demand that such persons whom they regard as their 'enemies', igbani-igban, be killed summarily.<sup>7</sup> Again in Table I, the men requested twenty times that their enemies be killed, for which more money was paid to Orisa in order to effect it than was paid merely for protection. The table also shows that farmers and traders were more concerned about the problem of protection and the killing of their enemies than people in other professions.

The reasons for this peculiar behaviour of farmers and traders in Epie-Atissa demonstrate the trend of events in Nigeria today. Nigeria as a country has been a victim of rapid change, caused by bad government and corruption. Most people have therefore lost confidence in the political

leaders. This has created a sense of insecurity among the people, and some therefore live in fear and uncertainty. This is because the various heads of State have laid much emphasis on the importance of agriculture in the national economy, in order to boost industrial development. People's hopes have been raised from time to time that the country must strive to become self-sufficient in the production of staple commodities and export products within the shortest possible time. As a result, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank Limited in 1978, "in order to reflect its all embracing character in dispensing credit to the entire agricultural sector of which the co-operative movement is a significant part".<sup>8</sup> Corresponding to this was the establishment of Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme which became operational in April, 1978, as a means of financing agriculture and rural development. As a result, over 1,000 loans amounting to N28.6 million, were guaranteed between April 1978 and August 1979. This caused a new breed of Nigerian urban farmers who were educated and affluent to emerge. But many diverted the money received to other sources like viable building projects. They built large estates which were rented at exorbitant prices, and bought luxurious cars with the balance. But the small farmer in the village received no help at all. In time however, instead of Nigeria experiencing the blessings of a Green Revolution, an expensive government dream that was launched in April 14, 1980, for the purpose of making the country self-sufficient in food and agricultural raw materials,<sup>9</sup> the

country continued to experience scarcity of food, and began importing food. Food items like wheat, rice, sugar, fish, milk and vegetable oil, were imported from the Western world, at excessive costs, the price of which soon went beyond the reach of the common man. This trend began since the Civil War, then rose rapidly <sup>in the mid</sup> 1970s, especially during the oil boom. Failure to arrest the trend continued to cause low levels of productivity in the 1980s, "entailing poverty for very large numbers of farmers, herdsmen and fishermen and their dependent and diets inadequate in amount or composition for most Nigerians".<sup>10</sup>

This trend probably affected the attitudes of the small scale, subsistence farmers in places like Epie-Atissa, in the Niger Delta, because they also interpreted such reverses in their profession as misfortunes caused by the witches for which they needed both protection and a "violent retaliation".<sup>11</sup>

Traders did not react differently because in most parts of the Niger Delta, the farmers who produce the staple food<sup>s</sup> like yam, cassava, sugar cane, plantain and cocoyam, etc., and the fishermen who kill the fish, are usually <sup>also</sup> traders too. This is because after selling their food crops and fish, they also invested their money to purchase manufactured goods which they sold in their localities. But the oil boom in Nigeria, and especially the Civil War that ended in 1970, disrupted and disorganised everything. Besides, the high rate of inflation also made it worse,

because the middlemen who sold such items to them, overpriced their goods, so that the petty traders in the village could no longer make much profit. Thus, seeing that their business was threatened, and the government was doing nothing to help, all of them, namely, the farmers, traders and fishermen, turned to their only source of hope. In this case, Orisa was their only hope, to which they could go for protection and to retaliation on their enemies.

Healing was another reason why people went to Orisa. The request for healing among the men occurred fifteen times, and in almost all the cases, it was in connection with their children, who were more vulnerable to the attack of various kinds of diseases.

*I have already mentioned* the high mortality rate of children in the area, (see at Chapter 1, pp.78-80). Thus people often came to Orisa in a state of panic concerning their sick children. For example, on 27th March, 1983, Mr. Segboruebi of Famgbe visited Orisa and said: "Bowo my son is at Port Harcourt. He had an accident with a motor vehicle and his left leg was broken. I want you to help me so the leg will be good". For this and a related reason, he paid N100.00 (one hundred Naira). Even the cry<sup>ing</sup> of a newborn child causes the father great concern. Thus Mr. Adiadia of Ogu went to Orisa on 28th February, 1984, and said:

I have come to pay the drink in connection with my wife's safe delivery. But the child cries a lot. If there is something wrong, please tell me.



The fact that those who were there for their children's illnesses did so mostly out of panic, is further portrayed by Mr. Amie of Yenagoa who went to Orisa on 5th March, 1984, and said:

I have brought the sheep in connection with that work you did. Now take good care of my children. One of my children is still ill; tell me what is responsible. If there is any other person, kill that person, and I will bring your drinks.

Another good example is that of Mr. Fullpower of Ikolo, who on 24th March, 1985, told Orisa:

My children are ill always. There is nothing I have not done, but nothing gets better. Help me please.

It could thus be seen that the problem of sickness in the family, especially of little children, always caused people to resort to Orisa, considering the historical reasons behind the coming of Orisa to Akaba.

#### Women Visitors to Orisa Shrine

During the same period , that is, from

9th February, 1983 to 7th February, 1986, a total of 142 women also went to ugula Orisa. Thus 34% of those who went to Orisa for enquiries during this period were men, and 66% were women. They also made enquiries about a wider range of matters than the men, 25 topics compared with 15. Perhaps these indicate something about the status of women in Epie-Atissa, and other parts of the Niger Delta. According to Elechi Amadi, women have always suffered from sexual discrimination because of "their relative muscular weakness",<sup>12</sup> coupled with the fact that most of their energies are spent in performing their principal function of child-bearing. Women therefore pass through several stages during which they are relatively helpless and need "the active assistance of men".<sup>13</sup> It is when significant help and support from the men are lacking that they tend to seek help from the higher powers.

It seems therefore understandable that the greatest problems that women face are sickness, and ~~childlessness~~. They prefer to go to the diviner in such circumstances instead of the hospital because they realize that the diviner will find out "what spirit had been wronged, and what human relationship has been strained".<sup>14</sup> They know that the medical doctor cannot. They therefore have more confidence in the diviner who handles the matter in the traditional way, without much delay, and much expense. The medical hospitals are not usually close by. They are mostly situated somewhere in the capitals or headquarters. Then it takes so long a time to see the doctor, and because of the acute shortage of drugs,

they are never supplied free or at subsidized prices. They must be bought at cut-throat prices from middle men who are, in most cases, not qualified to deal with drugs.

Women unburden their hearts to the diviners quite freely and confidentially, and expect to receive adequate attention. For example, on 15th August, 1985, a certain woman went to Orisa and complained as follows:

All my children are sick and my husband too. How about my mother? What my mother is doing is not good. I do not like it.

Then after a brief time of divination with ugbolo, Orisa responded as follows:

Your mother has something to say about your husband's sickness. If she says it, your husband will be well, and your children also.

This leads to the aspect of confession, which is the twelfth problem on the list. Seven women went to Orisa to confess to some of their misdeeds, during the period under consideration. For example, on March 9, 1984, a certain housewife went to Orisa and said:

You said I have something to say, so I came to confess. I went on top of my husband and I do that from time to time. After taking my bath at Ovom

waterside in the night, I usually walk back to the house naked.

On April 2, 1984, another lady went there and said:

The other day, you said I have something to say, so I have come to say them. There was a day my husband wanted to make love to me but I refused. But in the night, I allowed him even though I was in my menstrual period. I did not tell him about it.

Again on April 14, 1984, another lady said:

When I got married some years ago, I had an affair with somebody outside in the night, during which I was totally naked. When my father knew about it, he told me to tell Simeon Tinbiri or Orderly Torotein. But I was ashamed and did not do it. Now I have come to confess.

Furthermore, another lady said, on July 7, 1984:

My son's wife has a confession to make. She is here, so she will speak for herself.

Then speaking, the daughter-in-law said:

I climbed upon my husband in order to make love to him. Now I am pregnant, and they said I will die and cannot have the baby if I do not confess it.<sup>15</sup>

And on May 8, 1985, another lady said:

I came to make my confession. I usually have my bath naked in the waterside. And while experiencing miscarriage, I had sex with my husband.

Still continuing with her confession, she said:

I used to trade in garri.<sup>16</sup> But while travelling back home from the market in a boat, I always sit on the bag of garri even when I am in my menstrual period.

All these confessions which women make at the shrine of Orisa indicate the confidence they have in Simeon Tinbiri, priest of Orisa, and Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken, to whom the confessions are actually made. What follows after the confessions is not stated. But it is certain that

prescriptions are usually given on what to do in order to appease idionu, inibudu and Utoken. Otherwise it is regarded that they are under a curse locally called ukpinni, which implies that the person concerned eventually becomes a laughing stock to people in the community. It is like someone under a spell, and nothing that he or she does will prosper. That is why he has to undergo the ritual of pumu, 'purification', in order to undo the effect of the 'curse', ukpinni. As a result, tradition dictates what is isini-agugulu, 'that which is forbidden', and confession removes the psychological problems resulting in fear, anxiety and sleeplessness, expressed in Appendix II, Table 2, numbers sixteen and twenty-five, respectively. Both of these are not listed among the men's problems in Appendix II, Table 1.

Although the need for protection and prosperity came second in the list of the women's problems, the most money, totalling N162.00, was spent on these, in contrast to N.31.00 spend on sickness and the need for healing which come on of top the list. The reason is that there is a standard annual due of N10.00 to N18.00, which every family requiring protection from Orisa must pay at the beginning of each New Year. For example, on Feb. 20, 1985, a lady said:

"I have brought my New Year money of N10.00". On 29th April, 1985, another said, "I have brought my annual dues of N12.00". And on 26 January 1986, another said, "Take care of my house. I brought my New Year money of N18.00". Some

seem to pay this protection money as a tithe. For example, on January 30th, 1986, a lady said; "People have paid me for the work, so I have come to pay my money for the New Year of N10.00".

The men were also concerned about protection, as already indicated. And some paid handsomely at <sup>the</sup> Orisa shrine as well. For example, on August 20, 1984, someone was so desperately in need of protection against unknown forces that he paid the sum of N42.00, so himself and his family could be properly protected. But a majority of the men would probably prefer going far away to the Ibo heart land for protection, by joining some of the secret societies there. This fact was expressed by Robin Horton (see above, p.38); and it seems obvious here as well because the records indicate that on March 5, 1984, an unemployed applicant went to Orisa shrine seeking for protection for himself and his family. But in doing so, he confessed saying: "I have become a member of a certain secret society. Tell me if it is good or bad." Again the response by Orisa is not recorded. But the reason for the name, 'secret society' is because members must not divulge their secret to non-members. The punishment could be death if the sanctions are contravened. Many believe this could happen because "the secret societies are an embodiment of and a means of canalizing supernatural power."<sup>17</sup> Thus, this person who ran to Orisa for cover after becoming a member of a secret society had probably contravened one of the sanctions and was afraid of the consequences.

Generally women in Epie-Atissa do not find it convenient to go far away to the Ibo area for protection so they flood to Orisa which is nearby and available. And like the men, while asking for protection on the one hand, on the other hand, they also demand that their enemies be killed. So serious is this matter that both men and women seem to react alike. For example, on April 10, 1984, a certain man went to Orisa and said:

I ask you to kill all the children and the entire family of the person who put medicine in my son's house. Kill the wife and the children first, and let him come forward to confess.

Having said that, he paid N10.00, and also promised to bring a sheep after the work has been accomplished. Similarly, a housewife visited the shrine on 10th Feb. 1984, and said:

Kill anyone who is responsible for making me quarrel always with my husband. I will pay the amount required and one sheep.

Thus, any suspicion that any enemy has been killed, causes merriment, during which a sheep is slaughtered both at home and at the shrine of Orisa. The fact that this is the case is indicated by the visit of a male farmer to Orisa on 20th August, 1984. On arrival, he said:

My mother died, following our visit to you. My brother has been very happy, making merry since she died. Do you think she was the one who was worrying us?

The merriment does not stop at eating and drinking alone, when an enemy dies. Those concerned hurry to Orisa and pay their dues, with much appreciation. As a result, a certain trader, male, rushed there on 20th August, 1984, and said: "I come to pay money for killing my enemy". The amount he paid was N52.00. On September 5, 1984, a male farmer said:

You have killed the person who has been worrying me. So I have come to pay the N20.00 promised".

### **Child Bearing:**

Other reasons why women went to the shrine of Orisa include barrenness, locally called, mebiye-omo, which conveys the literary meaning of, 'cannot bear a child'. The concept of adoption is not known in Epie-Atissa, hence for a woman to be labelled as, mebiye-omo, is a situation considered to be "the worst affliction that can befall a woman".<sup>18</sup> Thus great care is taken, and much emphasis is placed on the safe delivery of the pregnant woman. Miscarriage which is known in Epie-Atissa as ifan-dubem, that is 'fallen-stomach', is not kindly accepted because the witches may be responsible.<sup>19</sup> In the word, ifan-dubem, ifan means 'belly' or 'stomach', and dubem means 'fallen'. The first few



months of pregnancy is known as, aya-ifanwo, that is, 'rising-stomach'. At this time the pregnancy is not very visible. But once it becomes visible, it is then called uyime, translated as 'pregnancy'.

Again as a result of the concept of igban, 'enmity', (see at pp.257f), many in Epie-Atissa do not believe that ifan-dubem, 'miscarriage' could be biologically caused. But they believe miscarriage is caused by witches because they enjoy feeding on the blood of an unborn child. Hence, the miscarriages of Maina, Aziza's wife, were blamed on Ishmael who died practising witchcraft (see above, p.66). It is the awareness of this that seemed to have created the three distinct stages in pregnancy in Epie-Atissa thought, namely, aya-ifan, 'rising-stomach', which contrasts with, ifan-dubem, 'fallen-stomach', and uyime, 'actual pregnancy'. As a result, pregnancies are never announced, lest one calls the attention of the witches. Rather, the fact is usually kept as confidential as possible. Similarly, deliveries are not announced for the same reason that the witches may kill it.

Along with these three stages of pregnancy is also a fourth concept, known as, ifan-fianam, meaning 'stopped-stomach'. This term is used to describe a woman who is either experiencing a period of intermediate barrenness or someone who has gone beyond the child-bearing age. Thus, there are two extremes in the life of a woman in Epie-Atissa. One extreme is with reference to the idea of aya-ifan,

'rising-stomach', which begins with her first experience of pregnancy. At the other extreme is ifan-fianam, 'stopped stomach', which may refer to the period of intermediate barrenness or menopause. Either of these stages may cause panic especially in the life of the woman, and she would continue to go to the diviner and to such related places until she is satisfied that she is not under the spell of witchcraft.

#### **Dreams and Omens:**

The need for the interpretation of 'dreams', ubene, and 'omens', isini-kanna, also constitutes another important reason for going to Orisa. It is the view of P.A. Talbot, that people in the Niger Delta, and those especially on the coast, pay much attention to dreams,<sup>20</sup> because much significance is attached to them. For example, most people in Epie-Atissa and others in the Niger Delta believe that it is not good to dream that one was asleep. Thus, to dream of lying asleep in bed, portends death. If he dreamt of sickness, it means health; and if he dreamt of health, it means the person will be sick any time soon. And, "to dream of a snake foretells that a child will be born to the house".<sup>21</sup> As a result, Arthur Glyn Leonard thinks "dreams occupy a very prominent place in the philosophy, the religion and the life"<sup>22</sup> of most communities in the lower Niger. Hence people in Epie-Atissa believe that ubene, 'dreams' are prophetic. As a result, those who attend the Aladura type of prayer houses maintain dream books that are

interpreted to them in the church by the 'prophet' or one of the 'leaders'.<sup>23</sup> Those who are fasting so their sins may be forgiven are therefore strictly advised to remember their dreams, because according to Turner, "surely you will hear a voice to make you understand whether you are forgiven or not."<sup>24</sup> One of the ways by which the priests of Ifa ascertain the will of his divinity is through dreams. "He may have his guidance through dreams during which it occurs to him that the divinity is asking him to do certain things; this he immediately carries out on waking."<sup>25</sup> To the Ifa priest then, 'dream', ubene is another method of divination. Similarly, omens are also closely watched during sacrifices, because "the better omen it was believed to be for the cause for which the sacrifice was offered,"<sup>26</sup> especially if birds picked up the remnants of whatever was sacrificed.

Thus, things pertaining to 'dreams', ubene and 'omens', isini-kanna, are not restricted to Epie-Atissa only. The need for proper interpretation of these phenomena causes the person concerned to go either to the diviner or the prayer houses, or both, because it is believed that misinterpretation of such experiences can be fatal. In certain instances, the experiences are related to the cosmology, and a good understanding of the cosmic forces, and how they operate becomes basic in one's ability to give a balanced interpretation of the phenomena.<sup>27</sup>

An example of how a dream can cause someone to consult Orisa is found in the case of a woman called Joan from Famgbe, who

visited Orisa on 27th February, 1983, and said her daughter always dreamt of being pursued by odumu, 'python', which is regarded as idiomu, 'deity'. As a result, she was always sickly. Again, on 6th January, 1984, Abie of Yenagoa said she found herself at the waterside in the dream, and saw a crocodile standing like a human being, which frightened her. Furthermore, on 3rd February, 1986, Paih of Ikolo said she dreamt that two of her children went out swimming in the river and the boy got drowned. Then with particular reference to isini-kanna, 'omens', Bessi of Ovom reported on 12 January, 1985, that a cock crowed in her house. Before then Matty of Swali had reported on 6th June, 1984, that she saw a 'chameleon', locally called ogumagala, while farming in the bush. She thought it had something to do with the vow she made to idiomu, 'deity', in connection with her newborn baby, which she has not paid. So she quickly returned home only to find that the bottle of kaikai she kept aside for the purpose was missing. She therefore came to Orisa to find out what the matter was. And again, on 29th December, 1984, Priscilla of Yenagoa said her child saw a worm; her husband also saw a worm, and she had seen a worm that morning in her house. Then she discovered that her sister's child was not well, so she wanted to know what the matter was.

Thus, in all these instances, the various things mentioned constitute significant aspects of the cosmology. For instance, the odumu, 'python' in the dream was not just a snake which went running after a girl, causing her to be

sickly, but it represents the deity to whom the mother had covenanted her before her birth. In the process of looking for a child, the mother had probably asked the idiomu for a child, and promised that the child will worship and serve the deity after being born. Now idiomu would continue to harass the girl until she decided to serve and worship it. Once this happens, the initiation ceremony takes the form of marital relationship between the girl and idiomu. Otherwise she would continue to experience various sicknesses and calamities which modern medicine may not be able to help to bring about a cure.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the nine women who expressed that they are harassed by idiomu, in Appendix II, Table 2, number 9, are also victims of identical situations.

The crocodile standing like a human being at the waterside may represent onyo-ida, 'witchcraft practitioner' who is capable of changing into any creature in order to evade identification. According to Evans-Pritchard, a witch may appear in a dream to an enemy, taking the form of: a man "with a dog-faced baboon's head",<sup>29</sup> or "a creature with the face of a man, the head, beak and body of a bird, and tail of a snake; a creature with the face of a man, the tusks and ears of an elephant, the body of a dog, and the legs of an old man; and a creature with the face of a man, the body of a swallow, and the wings of a bat."<sup>30</sup> It was therefore a common feature among the Azande, as it is in the Niger Delta. The water to which the boys went swimming and one drowned would represent the world, the abode of men, and malevolent forces which are always seeking the destruction

of men. But the drowning of the boy may be a prognostication of a misfortune that has occurred and will occur to the boy sooner or later, which Orisa may be capable to ward-off. In the omens, the 'cock', locally called efeni-mosi, meaning, 'male-chicken', crowing in the house is generally regarded as an evil warning of serious calamity. The 'worm', locally called igan, with reference to that which the fishermen use as baits in their fish-hooks, may indicate death or decay. The 'chameleon', ogumagala, has reference to someone who may be suffering from mental illness therefore untrustworthy, unstable. It changes colours according to its surroundings, and therefore is indicative of a sudden change in circumstances. As a result, those on journeys usually returned home immediately if it appeared to them on the way, so as to avoid unpleasant surprises far away from home. Thus those who serve at the shrine of Orisa and other similar shrines must be very familiar with the tradition and customs of the people in Epie-Atissa, and the things that mattered in the cosmology, and their meanings.

### Cases of Scepticism at Orisa Shrine

While people went to Orisa shrine for various reasons, it seems noteworthy that two women actually went there and queried Orisa, asking it to explain why there had been no result since their visit. This is indicated in Table 2, number 20. For example, on 22nd July, 1985, Ayibere of

Obogoro said: "I have not seen the result of the work I gave you. Why? I do not know where else to go". And again on 30th July, 1985, Bacin of Onopa said:

Just about some days ago, I came to pay the amount you demanded from me about the protection of my family. But my brother Chief Macauley Saife died. Why?

These questions are significant and noteworthy because they bring to the fore the fact that some people were probably doubtful and sceptical about divination at Orisa shrine, but were afraid to express their views. The men were definitely silent about this, which may indicate the fact that they met with total success in their dealings with Orisa. But that is not the case because on 26th January, 1986, Consider from Amarata, after experiencing a few things, asked Orisa to take care of his entire family, after which he paid his New Year's dues of N8.00. But while doing so, he remarked: "I still do not know why my child died". In other words, in spite of the fact that he has put himself and every member of his family into the protective care of Orisa for which some money is being paid, his son still died. He would probably want Orisa to explain, just as the women did, but he seemed to have been reasonably cautious.

The interest here is that several years ago, women in Epie-Atissa would have been afraid to query the authority of

a man; but now they are bold enough in 1985 to query the authority of a deity, idionu. This shows that women everywhere are becoming awake to the changing role of women. Indeed many of the women in Epie-Atissa may not be aware of the women's movement in the West, but this incident lends credence to the views expressed by Christine Obbo and others that women in some of the remote parts of Africa have already started to create "their own patterns of emancipation and, in the process, are spearheading social change for better or for worse".<sup>31</sup>

This leads to another concept in Epie-Atissa known as ifan-meme. Here, ifan means 'stomach' or 'belly', and meme means, 'agree'. Literarily therefore, ifan-meme means, 'stomach that agrees' or, 'agreeable stomach'. In proper English, the term means 'faith'. Someone who has 'faith', ifan-meme concerning Orisa and divinatory matters, it is believed, is the one who goes to Orisa with his or her problems, and all are easily solved. But the opposite of this is ifan-kpokpo; here kpokpo means, 'hard' or 'difficult'. Thus, the person designated as having ifan-kpokpo, is the doubting, faithless individual who has a 'hard-stomach'. They believe Orisa knows them, and it was the view of the Cultic Secretary, Japan Anyasara that those whose problems are not solved by Orisa fall in the category of those who did not have enough ifan-meme 'faith'. Therefore, the fault does not lie on Orisa but on the client.



### The Concept of Malevolent Forces in Epie-Atissa

The concept of malevolent forces in Epie-Atissa explains why they go to the diviners and prayer houses; the various ways in which the prayer houses have failed to meet the needs of the people, and why people tend to drift between these two groups. People in Epie-Atissa have strong belief in what are regarded as malevolent or evil forces, which are locally called osio didieli. Here, osio means 'soul' or 'spirit'; and didieli means 'evil'. Thus the words, osio didieli literally means, 'evil spirit' or 'Satan'. There is no other separate word for Satan in Epie-Atissa as it is in other languages. For example, Satan the devil is called Ekwensu in Ibo, where it is regarded as the deceiver.<sup>32</sup> In Yoruba Christian theology, Satan or devil is called Esu, which is regarded as the special messenger of Olodumare, 'the supreme God', in matters of worship and sacrifice. He is dreaded by man and other divinities because "he holds the power of life and death over them as prosperity or calamity for them (human beings) depends upon what reports he carries to Olodumare. Everybody seeks therefore to be on good terms with him."<sup>33</sup>

In Epie-Atissa, Osio didieli, seems to constantly convey bad reports to Izibe, so people constantly experience calamities. They believe that he is the one who creates discord among people, so that those who were once 'friends', ugbali, soon become 'enemies', igban. It is osio didieli

who goes into families to create disharmony between husbands and wives by causing constant 'quarrels', idani, especially in polygamous homes between the mates. He poisons the hearts of mothers-in-law with hatred and jealousy against the daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law against mothers-in-law, etc. One of the main targets of osio didieli therefore, is the breaking up of the family units. He gradually permeates the system, and systematically poisons every heart, and thus creates the dangerous element called igban, 'enmity' everywhere. This leads to evil plans; each wishing to undo and eliminate the other through dangerous, diabolical methods, by night and by day. People are then gripped with fear, and in the course of running for their lives, acquire 'evil medicines', locally called ibii-dieli, which leads to the acquisition of 'witchcraft', ida.<sup>34</sup>

Thus from the concept of igban, 'enmity', those who have mutually vowed to seek the destruction of any particular person or persons by whatever method, are known as igbani-igban. 'group of enemies': And those who belong together in the coven of witches and wizards with intent to perpetuate evil are known as igbani-ida, 'the coven of witches'. But according to Epie-Atissa tradition, the innocent, ordinary citizen stands protected against these forces by oloko utoken, 'the laws of the land', or igbese utoken, 'the things of the land', which are against witchcraft practices and the tendency to kill a fellow human being by whatever method. People in nearby Okrika area call

this Amakiri,<sup>35</sup> while the Kalabari people call it Amanyanaoru, 'the divinity that owns our land', or Akaso, for short.<sup>36</sup>

Having contravened igbese-utoken or oloko utoken, which are established by tradition, osio didieli, 'Satan the devil', who caused the person to do so in the first place, now stirs up inibudu, 'the ancestors' and other 'divinities' which constitute igbese-utoken, to rise in vengeance. It is therefore believed in Epie-Atissa that all the 'evil practices' and related atrocities committed by man, which are known locally as isini-didieli, which once committed constitute 'sin', odieli-wulem, are motivated by 'Satan the devil', osio-didieli. Thus those who are so inclined to doing 'evil', odieli and nothing 'good', ovie, are those against whom people must seek protection, because they are possessed by osio didieli. Sometimes the individual may not be easily detected; the person could be one's mother, father, wife, relatives, etc. This uncertainty makes it even worse so that everybody is held suspect.

It is for this reason specific 'taboos', agugulu, are maintained, and they become the moral code of the land. A number of them have already been mentioned (see above, Chapter 1, pp.71-72). They constitute the biblical parallel of 'Thou shalt not' of the people, in which the inibudu and idiomu, 'the ancestors and the divinities' take care of the sanctions. The principal taboo in Epie-Atissa is that of 'killing a man', edibe-gbiyem. Here, the word edibe means

'man', and gbiye means, 'to kill'; the 'm' is an enclitic emphasizing the 'act'. Hence edibe-gbiyem has the literal meaning of 'the act of man being killed'. The sanction is the death of the killer. In some cases, it may cause the death of the individual concerned and many more, until proper appeasement has been made. For those who killed inadvertently however, sanctions could be avoided if they confess promptly and then undergo the ritual of lala ogbo thereafter (see above, pp.171-172). Other taboos include, stealing, incest, adultery; a woman having sexual intercourse with her husband while still in her menstrual period; a woman climbing upon her husband or any other man during sexual intercourse, etc. To break any of these 'laws', oloko is to 'commit sin', wulu-odieli, which could result in terrible calamities such as sickness and death. The only way in which the situation can be remedied is if the culprit quickly confessed to everything, and underwent the rite of 'purification', pumu (see above, pp.163-164).

In the present circumstances, people in Epie-Atissa look for protection at an early age by going to a number of places, namely, the onyo-obu, 'witch-doctor', for protective charms, herbs and medicines; 'the diviner', onyo-pulu-isini, at various 'abodes of divinities', ufamu-idiomu in order to know the causes of their problems and also to receive solutions and protection. Then others go to the Prayer Houses, locally called ufamu-ebбели, meaning, 'house of prayer'. Those who go to the Prayer Houses believe that the evil spirits cannot go there because they are controlled by

osio-vie, 'good spirit', in reference to the 'Holy Spirit'. In other words, people in Epie-Atissa believe that the prayer houses are insulated against Satan. For example, igbani-ida, 'witches' cannot find their way there; therefore the sick usually go there to seek shelter throughout the duration of their sickness, and to receive prayer. In the process, some may recover, some may not, and may then go to Orisa or other places for divination to ascertain the cause or causes of their sickness.

A number of objects are symbolically used in some or all these prayer houses to drive away osio-didieli from their surroundings. The first is incense, which is used to fumigate the sanctuary and congregation, so that the smell will 'drive out' all evil spirits.<sup>37</sup> They believe that witches cannot stand the smell of incense. Secondly, the Bible is used as a magical object, which could be opened and "laid by the head of a new born infant"<sup>38</sup> in order to ward off evil spirits. Thirdly, crosses, candles and holy water are cultic symbols, in which the cross "represents the concept of the Christian taking up his cross of suffering, hardship, or persecution as Christ did",<sup>39</sup> but the symbolic atoning and vicarious death of Christ is disregarded. The candle when lit invokes "certain guardian angels",<sup>40</sup> and has probably led some to develop "an elaborate private candle cult associated with the hierarchy of angels",<sup>41</sup> and therefore in the occult. It is therefore understandable why the priests in the shrine of Orisa recommended the use of the Bible, candles and the cross for the treatment of Chief

Macauley Saife when he was sick in the General Hospital at Yenagoa, on 27 July, 1985. Members are encouraged to bring bottles of water which are called 'holy water', locally called amini osio-vie, meaning 'water of holy spirit', after being consecrated. They are to drink it because it is believed that it has 'power', Ukali, to heal stomach troubles, including barrenness.<sup>42</sup> Some could be diluted in water when bathing because it has curative powers for skin diseases, and witches will also be afraid to come close. They were also to wash their feet before entering the sanctuary, which is similar to what the Moslems do. It also corresponds with other related practices in some Yoruba river cults.<sup>43</sup>

The Prayer Houses lay stress on 'prayer', known in Yoruba as adura, hence aladura, 'praying person'. This is known locally as ebбели, and the 'house of prayer' is ufamu-ebбели. They also lay stress on 'visions', moneti, which is parallel to 'divination', isini-pulem. As a result, people go there in order to find out from the 'prophet' or 'prophetess' about the cause or causes of their problems, just as they would do if they went to Orisa. In order to perform the anticipated miracles, the 'prophets', 'prophetesses', 'apostles' and 'leaders' in the Aladura type of churches tend to "retain much of the power of traditional medicine"<sup>44</sup> with their concept of Christian practice. This idea among the Yoruba to retain what is partly traditional in Christian practice also persists in the Niger Delta, especially in churches that originated from among the

people, therefore different in several ways from missionary churches. A good example is the Christ Army church which was founded by the followers of Prophet Garrick Sokari Braide after his death in 1918, and now has branches in several parts of the Niger Delta, especially in Kalabari area. Some of the practices include, songs, drummings, and dancing during church services in ways that are commonly practised traditionally among the people. Earlier, the followers were accused of observations in which they drank of Prophet Braide's bath water because they thought it had healing effect.<sup>45</sup> This may be another concept of 'holy' water, amini-osio-vie, in which the Prophet's 'bath water', known in Epie dialect as amini-kemu probably made the 'holy water' more holy and more potent to the devotees.

Thus many who attend such prayer houses may have a somewhat unorthodox concept of salvation. They make prohibitions similar to those in the 'shrines', ugula of the 'divinities', idiomu, such as, wearing of shoes in the prayer house,<sup>46</sup> and women who are in their menstrual periods debarred from entering the prayer house. They are 'consecrated', pumu by being sprinkled with holy water before allowed in. Thus, the veneration of divinities which are ritualistic in traditional religion is parallel to "the veneration of angels and certain heavenly bodies"<sup>47</sup> in the prayer houses.

The fact that some people in Epie-Atissa have been disappointed by such prayer houses is indicated in the

register in the Shrine of Orisa at Akaba by 5 persons, comprising 3 men, and 2 women. For example, on 10th February, 1984, a woman called Cinema from Yenagoa, went to Orisa, and said:

I dreamt that I was pregnant. But a man from 'Holiness Church' told me that evil people have tied me.... Tell me if there is anything I can do.

Similarly, on 22 February, 1984, Mr. Black of Ikolo said:

'People in the church' said that 3 of my children will die. My brother's son at Port Harcourt also will die. If there is anything I can do to stop this, please tell me.

Mr. S. Olodu of Ikolo, on 26 March, 1984, said:

The reason I am coming is that 'the church people' said I have given my father's son witch-craft. Now I am begging you; if I have witchcraft, kill me. But if I have none and others who are witches are accusing me falsely, kill them. I will bring sheep. Three people, James, Jason and Howells, have died in the village. They said I killed them. If it is not myself, and if you kill the person or persons who killed them, I will bring you sheep and drinks.

In all these instances, by the 'holiness church', and 'church people', reference is to people in the prayer houses, generally known as Isosi osio vie, meaning, 'holy spirit church', to which several people resorted for help. But again on 26 October, 1985, Mr. Igwe of Onopa said:

'Church people' said one of my children will die. They also said somebody is worrying me. If you kill that person, I will bring one sheep.

Finally, on 26th January, 1986, Mr. Amaye of Ovom said:

I have paid the old New Year's money. My first wife



is not well. The 'church people' said she will die. So please take care of my house because it is the only place I have got.

Thus, it could be seen that people in the prayer houses located in different places, such as Yenagoa, Ikolo, Onopa and Ovom, respectively, gave visions about death and witchcraft, which caused the people to be more afraid than was necessary. Mrs. Laura Olodu of Ikolo, for instance, was accused to have practised witchcraft, and of killing certain people in the community. Enraged, she invoked Orisa on the whole prayer house, and promised to pay her dues of a sheep and drinks, if Orisa vindicated her innocence and killed her accusers. Mr. Amaye of Ovom was told his wife will die, but nothing else was suggested in order to prevent this from happening. He therefore left the prayer house and asked Orisa for help. The trend is the same in all the other cases. It is however worse in connection with Mrs. Laura Olodu who declared war against the prayer house at Ikolo for accusing her of witchcraft. She would no doubt regard the prayer house as one of her deadliest 'enemies', igbani igban, therefore a potential 'malevolent force', and the abode of osio-didieli, 'Satan the devil'; not that of osio-vie, 'holy spirit'. She calls them 'witches', igbani-ida, who are accusing her falsely. They should therefore be killed, and not spared. Mrs. Laura Olodu may have thought she was justified when, following the death of the leader of a 'Prayer House' at Akaba in 1982, Mr. J.B. Bosin, he was declared a wizard and therefore treated as they did to Ishmael Binadomu, already discussed in Chapter

1. Thus, while 'witchcraft', ida, is dreaded as "a maleficent power innate in certain people, who can mysteriously harm others",<sup>48</sup> and while ida is "the chief explanation of unexpected sickness, death and misfortune in many African religious systems",<sup>49</sup> other malevolent forces in Epie-Atissa would also include, osio didieli, 'evil spirits', or more specifically, 'Satan the devil'; inibudu, 'the ancestors', Utoken, 'the land goddess' and all related idiomu, 'divinities'. And for people like Mrs. Laura Olodu of Ikolo, the 'prayer houses', ufamu-ebebeli could also be regarded as one of the potential malevolent forces. In the circumstances, Orisa at Akaba becomes one of the only places of safety to which people may go.

#### Various Types of People who visited Orisa Shrine

For the purpose of clarity, two tables, Tables 4 and 5, Appendix II, were prepared in order to simplify explanations concerning the type of people who visited the Shrine of Orisa for divination, from February 9, 1983 through February 7, 1986. It would be seen from Table 4, that people visited Orisa during the period under consideration from thirty known places. But the localities from whence six persons came are unknown because they were not indicated in the register. The Table 4 also tells us about the names of each village or town, the population as at 1983, the clan, then the state of origin, and finally the number of persons who visited from each village or town.

Thus we discovered from Table 4, that people visited <sup>the</sup> Orisa Shrine at Akaba from within the Rivers State, that is the Niger Delta, and also from outside the Niger Delta. It thus became necessary to prepare Table 5 which explains this more clearly. Now it is realized that a total of 208 persons visited the shrine during that period from 27 towns and villages within the Rivers State. It seems remarkable that of the two clans which constitute Epie-Atissa, people from all the 12 towns and villages in Atissa, numbering up to 174 persons, visited Orisa Shrine. But people from 10 of the 15 towns and villages that constitute Epie clan, numbering 28 persons, visited Orisa. People from the five other villages that did not visit Orisa include:

Ekenfa	-	population	1393
Kpansia	-	population	3645
Opolo	-	population	1278
Yenegwe	-	population	674
Yenizue-Epie	-	population	482

The reason could be that they are all close to Kpansia, which is a famous centre for igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination performed by Mrs. Better Wilson, and also the centre for Epie Bottle divination by 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo. But people also came from Kolokuma, Ogbia and Sagbama districts, in the Rivers State, all of which are further away from Epie-Atissa.

Interestingly, some came from other parts of Nigeria, such as Urhobo, Bendel State, near Benin city; others came also from the Ibo and Yoruba areas. The person from Urhobo was a woman called Beauty, a trader who had a shop at Yenagoa who was not happy that people bought from her on credit, but did not pay. Furthermore, her sister wanted to come to trade at Yenagoa, and she thought it wise for Orisa to tell her if it will be good with her sister if she came. She visited Orisa only once, on 25th March, 1984. Then on 27th July, 1984, Mrs. Abiola of Ijebu, and Reuben also of Ijebu, in Yorubaland, went to Orisa. Mrs. Abiola had just come out of the hospital, following an operation, which cost her the use of her left hand and left leg. Now she was pregnant so she wanted proper care and protection to enable her to deliver safely. Reuben went to complain that his second wife was barren; and that he needed protection for his entire household. He was a trader as well, by profession. Thus Wilson Omu of Ihuoma, in the Ibo area, went to Orisa on 20th February, 1985, to ask him to stop the court action which someone had instituted against him; and to ask for protection. He seemed to be a farmer.

Thus Orisa Shrine at Akaba serves people effectively, within the Epie-Atissa clan, including the most educated chief in the area, and the paramount ruler of Atissa clan. People from the neighbouring districts to the East and West are also served, as well as people from Iboland, Urhobo, near Benin city, in Bendel State, and from Yoruba land. This leaves people from the Hausa to the North, a major tribe,

and others from Calabar, the Efik tribe. But 100% of the villages in Atissa; 66% of the villages in Epie area; and 81% of the towns and villages in Epie-Atissa clans, utilize the services of Orisa at Akaba.

Among the women, housewives, widows, farmers, traders, single women, students and priestesses went; and among the men, farmers, traders, government and factory workers, teachers, traditional rulers, landlords and an unemployed applicant, went to Orisa. And in certain cases, their professions determined the need.

#### **Other Divinatory Centres in Epie-Atissa**

As already mentioned, there are several divinatory centres in Epie-Atissa. A more exhaustive field-work should include not less than eight centres of divination in Atissa clan, and seven of such centres in Epie clan. Thus in Epie-Atissa, there are up to 15 divinatory centres to which people go, and all are linked to various divinities, some of which are personal, and others for the entire community. Nevertheless, it is clear that Orisa shrine at Akaba is one of the principal centres in the whole area.

#### **Female Mediums:**

Mention has already been made of a number of places, such as: Madam Erekalayefa Tinbiri, Oloko divination at Ikolo

which was heavily patronised in years past, but now dwindling, partly because she is getting very old, and partly because she thinks igbani-ida, 'witchcraft practitioners' are out to destroy her profession. She is nonetheless still being patronised, but since there are no records kept, the type of people who go there cannot be easily determined. The same can be said of Madam Zikumona and her mirror or idiama divination at Ogu, and also Mrs. Better Wilson's 'glass' or igilasi divination at Kpansia. Both are fairly well patronised, but as was earlier explained, all that they do is covered up in utmost secrecy. This is not only because they are women, but probably because as priestesses of their own personal deities, this was one occasion they could positively demonstrate their equality or superiority with men who had always regarded them as being inferior. It has to be realized that these women did not have the opportunity of any education. Therefore they would normally have been denied any opportunity of access to any position of authority comparable to those of other educated women in modern Nigerian society. But now, as mediums to their personal deities, they have experienced authority<sup>50</sup> and were determined to demonstrate it by the control of confidentiality.

#### **Male Mediums:**

The situation was different in places like the Aruku-eken cult at Famgbe, and the Epie Bottle Divination cult at Kpansia, since both are controlled by men. Perhaps what

will be described in these two places will supplement what has already been said about Orisa cult at Akaba. It has already been mentioned that Harvest Izonfatei is the chief priest of Aruku-eken cult at Famgbe. Since he is fairly educated and young, he was open and very cooperative.

He maintains no records either, but on 30th September, 1985, one of the devotees of Aruku-eken, called Mr. Lot decided to solicit the protection of this divinity for his children and grandchildren. He did so in the presence of all the other devotees and also in the presence of this writer and his colleagues during the field work. Mr. Lot was about 70 years old; he has no education, but one of his sons is a lawyer, and former member of the Rivers State House of Representatives up to 1984.

Mr. Lot had received information that some of his grandchildren belonging to this lawyer, now practising in Port Harcourt, and those of his other son in Lagos, were sick. He had also heard that his sons were facing difficult times in their various businesses, and also in their homes. He therefore pleaded with Aruku-eken to help. But for this to be accepted, the matter must be presented in the traditional way. He must produce a bottle of kaikai before his matter could be officially tabled. But it is a taboo that once inside the ugula of Aruku-eken, no-one is allowed outside until every matter had been dealt with. Even then, the chief priest must give the indication, after which people must then rise according to a given pattern. In



**PLATE 41** - Picture shows that bottles of kaikai, 'palm gin' are stored in the ceiling of the shrine of Aruku-eken, Famgbe, and sold to clients. The cultic 'drink seller', onyo-de-idi is seen coming down with a bottle of kaikai from the cellar.



**PLATE 42** - Mr. Lot presenting his problem to Aruku-eken at Famgbe, with a bottle of kaikai supplied from the cultic cellar. Note the kneeling position maintained, before the chief priest, Harvest Izonfatei.



other words, Mr. Lot cannot go outside, either by himself, or send someone to purchase for him a bottle of kaikai. This is prohibited because he was already inside the 'shrine', ugula. As a result, the chief gave instructions to one of the worshippers to climb up to the ceiling, and bring a bottle of kaikai from the cellar (see Plate 41, showing an improvised cellar in the roof of the ugula made of mat, in which bottles of kaikai are kept, and sold to clients during emergencies).

While the position from where the bottle of kaikai emerged seemed rather remarkable, its presentation seems even more so. For example, Mr. Lot took the bottle, moved towards ebeni-idiomu, 'chief priest', knelt in front of him, and said:

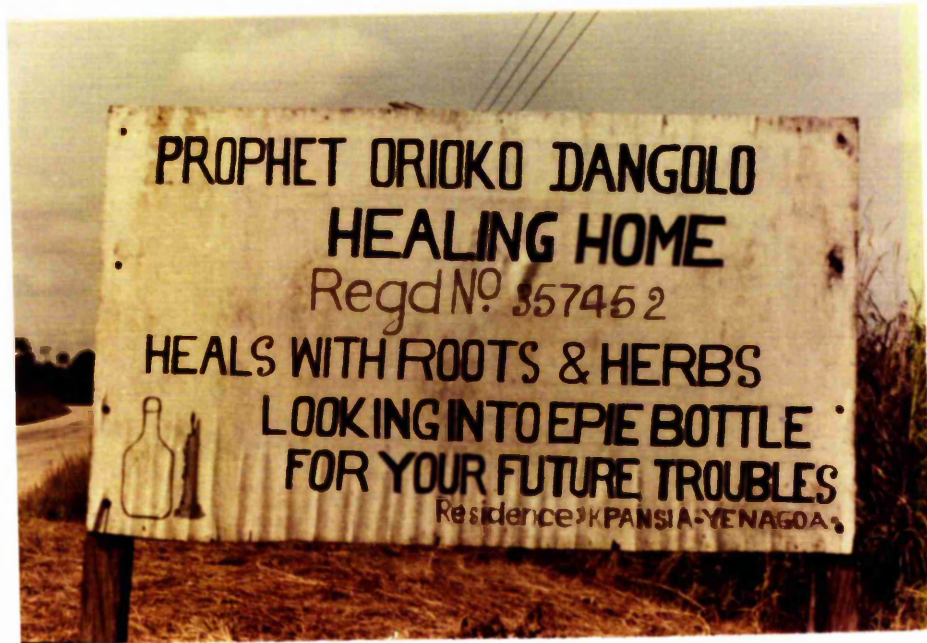
I come to present this drink to Aruku-eken. I understand that things in the houses of my sons, both at Port Harcourt and Lagos, are not good. Things are not right with them. The children are sick; people are sick. That is not proper at all. I have therefore come with this drink to present it to Aruku-eken, and to ask for health, long life and good protective covering for all of them. Should you do this for me, I will return soon with more drinks.

This episode is depicted in Plate 42, in which Mr. Lot is seen kneeling before the ebeni-idiomu, Mr. Harvest Izonfatei, with a bottle of kaikai in his right hand. As a cultic member of this idiomu, Mr. Lot is also attired as someone ready for 'war', ikoni; the chalk on his right

indicates the ritual of lala-ogbo, and that around the eye, the ritual of poko-adu (see above, Chapter 2, pp.171-172). It is noteworthy that all the others behind him are similarly marked. At the end of Mr. Lot's presentation, all the worshippers responded: "Yea, idi Aruku-eken", meaning, "Yea, Aruku-eken's 'drink'". The fact that things are done in specifically ritualistic manner in the shrine of Aruku-eken, has already been mentioned. (See at Chapter 2, pp.169f). The ebeni idiomu received the drink, then made a formal presentation:

Aruku-eken, Aruku-eken, Aruku-eken, your servant Mr. Lot has brought to you a request in connection with his children in Port Harcourt and Lagos. You already know them by name. I implore you to protect them. Do not allow any evil to befall them. Drink this, and let the required protection be intensified.

Following this formal presentation by Harvest Izonfatei, the drink was then served in the manner already described, before the departure. Since no register is maintained in this shrine as it is at Akaba, it was not possible to know the types of people who had visited this shrine for divinatory purposes, the amount charged and for what purposes specifically, and the prescriptions. But from Mr. Lot's case, it was obvious that many came. Here no register is maintained, because it is believed that Aruku-eken knows them already by their names. Those who go there would probably make similar requests as Mr. Lot, for protection, long life, good health and healing for the family. Some may



**PLATE 43** - Note Prophet Orioko Dangolo's sign board, indicating he also runs a healing home where herbs and roots are used.

perhaps make similar requests as were contained in Orisa's register. But while members of the community may consult with Aruku-eken at the offering of only a bottle of kaikai, as Mr. Lot did, non-members of the community may pay the sum of N2.00 as initial consultation fee, and charges may then depend upon the severity of the particular problem.

What obtains at the shrine of either Orisa or Aruku-egene is quite different from what obtains at the Epie-Bottle Divination cult, headed by 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo at Kpansia, which was visited on 27th November, 1985. As earlier discussed, here the leader is a 'prophet', who could have brought his operation in line with what obtains in the Aladura type of prayer houses. But it is not. As a healing home where roots and herbs are used, as indicated on his signboard (see Plate 43), his operation should have looked like those of the herbalists, but it is not. Rather, as already mentioned, his clients ingest a mixture of LSD, before watching the bottle. The greater the quantity mixed the better. Therefore people are encouraged to purchase as much as N9.00 worth, or even double that for a really concentrated mixture that is expected to yield maximum results. Some claimed to have received marvellous results that way, but others said they were still looking at the bottle and had had no results yet. They were however expecting. At the time of the interview on 23rd March, 1985, it was stated that membership of this cult had risen to over 100 people, including men, women and



**PLATE 44** - Prophet Orioko Dangolo  
and some of his disciples.

children. Some of the members were about 60 years old, or more. (See Plate 44, showing 'Prophet' Dangolo and some of his disciples). In order to find out about the effect of this Epie Bottle Divination on people privately and unknown to the 'prophet', it was decided to conduct an independent interview with some of the members, and to record some of their reactions and experiences. As a result, a number of persons were interviewed on Monday, October 21, 1985 at Yenagoa-Ovom, which is about 15 miles away from Kpansia, the actual location of the Epie Bottle Divination. One of such persons was Mr. George Moses, about 40 years old. He is married, with 9 children, and works with the Marine Division of the Yenagoa Local Government. He said he became a member of the 'Bottle', ololo, cult because of several problems which caused him to experience too much hardship and suffering. For example, he was out of a job for a long time and found it difficult to maintain his family and to pay his bills. As a result, he owed<sup>to</sup> several people and did not know how he could repay those debts. Furthermore, he experienced several deaths such as the death of his immediate junior brother, who left him with a wife and four children. He also lost his junior sister, who left him with a son. His elder sister's daughter became seriously ill during the same period and caused him so much restlessness. He was thus bombarded with trials and tribulations from various angles which caused him to travel from one place to the other in search of help. He finally became a member of this cult for the purpose of receiving help. He paid N10.00 (ten Naira) and a packet of candles before being registered as a member

in 1977. Since then, he said he has experienced some success in life, because things have improved quite remarkably.

Another client who was helped through 'Bottle' ololo divination cult was his junior sister, who confessed to be a witch and needed to be helped. She also made mention of all those in the 'witches cult' in the village, and exposed all the wicked and evil practices involved. By so doing, she has helped to cleanse and purge the village of witchcraft practices. About this same time, the elder brother of George Moses was also exposed as a wizard through the 'bottle cult'. However, another person called Ute Abaribote was still expecting to see the result of his membership of this cult. In his own case, he said he has been working very hard in his occupations of farming, fishing and palm-cutting, but without any success. Things have continued to worsen in spite of his hard work. He was therefore hoping for success through the membership of the Epie 'Bottle' ololo divination cult. He was already about 60 years old.

In all these cases, it was mandatory for each person seeking membership to present the membership fee of N10.00, and a packet of candles. It was not a requirement as in other cases, to present either kaikai, 'palm gin', or any other type of drink. But, having registered, the person must be prepared to purchase large quantities of the 'flour' from Britain, mixed with cold water so that the person may drink.

Some do not drink alone. George Moses, for example, gives it to all his 4 children, from the ages of 3 months to 13 years. He thinks it causes them sleeplessness, but also makes them strong and healthy. He believes the substance cures various sicknesses such as influenza and other nerve related diseases. In other words, people who are sick of certain minor illnesses get healed upon becoming members of this cult. Some may behave abnormally after drinking the mixture.

For example, some may scream, shout, jump, and behave like lunatics, by either tearing or taking off their clothes in public. Some have died in the process. In such circumstances, such persons are accused of manifesting witchcraft because people in the 'Bottle', ololo cult do not believe one can ever take an overdose of their mixture, because to them, the more the quantity taken, the better and more effective it could be. Thus people who behave abnormally after taking the mixture are regarded as those with evil in their hearts for which they need to confess to the 'Prophet'.

Thus, although George Moses claimed that most of his problems have been solved since becoming a member of the Epie 'Bottle', ololo divinatory cult, there were many who claimed that things were either not certain, or not getting better, or in fact things were getting worse. One of such persons was Mrs. Ring John, elder sister of George Moses who has been a member since 1979. According to her, she has



continued to meet with one calamity after another without any concrete solution. Mrs. Akumeke Nedd also expressed similar sentiments. But they are all hoping for solutions soon.

**The Financial Implications of Divinatory Practices**  
**in Epie-Atissa**

Having now looked at some of the most important centres of divination and their clientele in Epie-Atissa, it seems quite evident that divinatory practices are well patronized, and divination as a phenomenon has become a fairly lucrative business in the area. This conclusion is supported by a number of reasons.

First, it has been seen from our study of Orisa cult at Akaba that a total number of 218 persons visited that 'shrine', ugula, for divination from February 9, 1983, to February 7, 1986. This is a conservative figure only, since the possibility of the secretary recording some and leaving out others cannot be ruled out. The statistical data presented in Tables 1-5, nonetheless stands, in the absence of a more accurate record. Noteworthy is the fact that in a period of about 3 years, 76 men went to Orisa for divinatory purposes, and spent a total sum of N656.20 (six hundred and fifty-six Naira, twenty kobo). This was equivalent to about £656.00 (six hundred and fifty-six pounds, British Sterling, according to the exchange rate as at 1983-early 1986).

Similarly, during that same period, 142 women paid to Orisa the sum of N475.80. Thus the men and women together paid to Orisa within a space of 3 years, the total sum of N1,132.00, (one thousand, one hundred and thirty-two Naira). This excludes all unrecorded payments, and gifts in the form of animals, food items and drinks. It also excludes all unrecorded payments in connection with annual dues, and other protection money that some people may have paid.

In other words, it is possible that there were some who gave and would like to remain anonymous so what they gave was not recorded. This could be a possibility because, according to Marion Kilson, mediums in Ga society received for their services not only money, but also livestock and agricultural produce.<sup>51</sup> If such continued over a period of time, it seems certain that a medium could be as successful as a trader, and even much more because the fluctuations of market trends may not affect the medium as they would the trader. It is further stated that mediums in the Ga Society "frequently convert fluid capital into land and buildings. The best-kept houses in a village or a city street may well belong to mediums. Through mediumship, therefore, Ga women may achieve financial security as well as other less obvious but perhaps more basic emotional rewards."<sup>52</sup> While in Ga society, women were mostly mediums, in the Epie-Atissa society we have seen that it is mixed. The women function as mediums to their personal deities, but the men are mostly appointed by the whole community. But all received the same general amount of N2.00 (two Naira) as consultation fee.



**PLATE 45** - Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, in his modern building.

The minimum of N8.00 was charged annually for protection by Orisa, and perhaps by others as well, excluding service charges which were charged according to the nature of the problem. 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo charged N10.00 as membership fee including a packet of candles. Other charges probably differed from one ugula to another, but in general, especially the women like, Erekalayefa Tinbiri, priestess of Bekenowei who is in charge of oloko divination at Ikolo; Madam Zikumona, priestess in charge of idiama, 'looking glass divination' at Ogu, and Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination at Kpansia, had common understanding in maintaining that the consultation fee remains standard. And like the Ga mediums, they either live in modern block buildings, as is the case with Better Wilson and Madam Zikumona, or in a mud house roofed with zinc, as in the case of Madam Erekalayefa. They are by contrast therefore much better than some of their counterparts who live in houses built with mud and roofed with thatch. Similarly, all the male priests could be considered as being better off than some of their male counterparts in their secular situations. Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene, for example, lives in his own modern building with a fairly large front yard, as was indicated in Plate 10. Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken also lives in his own modern building, as indicated in Plate 45. And 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo also lives in his own modern building, as indicated in Plate 44. He has also built four other houses close by, with the aim of establishing a mini estate for himself. In an

environment where most people are poor, such will be regarded by many as evidence of affluence.

A second point worth considering is the idea of registering the business of divination with the Government so as to obtain a license to operate it. We have already seen two cases: Madam Erekalayefa Tinbiri, priestess in charge of oloko divination at Ikolo, with the registration number 84975; and 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo, Epie Bottle Divination, with the registration number 357451. George K. Park calls this "a legitimating procedure",<sup>53</sup> by which divination in the folk world is brought to be on the same level

with what we may call the 'licensing and certifying complex' in the contemporary urban world, which is similarly concerned with such matters as birth, marriage, and death, and which functions in connection with movement over social boundaries and the infringement of property rights, as well as with crime and dangerous or irksome insanity.<sup>54</sup>

This also brings divination on to the same level with stores licensed to sell and dispense patent medicines and others which may sell alcoholic drinks, etc. This indicates Government approval of divinatory practices in the area and also bestows authority on the practitioners, so that they are protected by law. This could lead to corruption as evidenced in the case of 'Prophet' Orioko Dangolo's sales of what is apparently Lysergic Acid Diethylanide (LSD) to his customers, yet making them believe that it is 'flour' from

Britain, capable of bringing answers to their problems. The evidence by George Moses has already indicated that there had been cases of overdose in which some people went into a state of coma. Some went mental, but some died.<sup>55</sup> But such cases are usually treated as manifestations of witchcraft, and police action is not usually taken against him because he is licensed by the Government. This is therefore a good example in which power and recognition to diviners who are dealing with complex, fundamental human problems could lead to corruption. It was precisely for the purpose of checking the possible disruption of justice that the Federal Government of Nigeria banned all civil servants from becoming members of any secret society, in 1977.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, in a country like Nigeria where bribery and corruption are in <sup>the</sup>ascendancy,<sup>57</sup> and where the cultural norms and values have been greatly stamped by predominantly Western values,

people in Epie-Atissa regard divination and its institution, as their primary hope of social control. By this, the reference is to the fact that people in Epie-Atissa and others in the Niger Delta, in particular, and Nigeria in general, belong in a specific culture, or the "ordered system of meanings and symbols, in terms of which social interactions takes place".<sup>58</sup> And in order to preserve its cultural norms and values, most of which are in the form of taboos,<sup>59</sup> as already discussed with particular regard to Epie-Atissa, the people must set up a system which will enable the machinery to run smoothly, and thereby achieve self-preservation. This machinery, once in

operation, could dispense reward and punishment, and bring about the awareness of morality,<sup>60</sup> especially in the areas of 'right', ovie, and 'wrong', odieli. This, according to Leis, "may encourage conflicts and aggressive activity, thereby seeming to tear society apart. But to the contrary, beliefs and rituals permit the release of pent-up tensions and frustrations, and therefore indirectly provide the same positive function for society".<sup>61</sup> For this reason, it is the view of Victor Turner that "the diviner feels he is not primarily operating on his own behalf, but on behalf of his society."<sup>62</sup> Thus the implication is that all the various divinatory practices performed in the various shrines in Epie-Atissa: namely, Orisa at Akaba; Aruku-eken at Famgbe; Idiama at Ogu; Oloko at Ikolo; Igilasi and Epie-Bottle at Kpansia, are done for the good of the society. This may account for the fact that people went especially to Orisa from various walks of life, and from various parts of the country.

## CHAPTER 4

FOOTNOTES

1. This can be considered to be revolutionary, especially by Epie-Atissa cultural standards where record keeping in traditional matters was previously viewed to be a taboo. People therefore relied mostly on oral tradition in such matters. For related problems that this can cause, see E.J. Alagoa, 'Oral Tradition Among the Ijo of the Niger Delta', Journal of African History, 7, 3 (1966), pp.405-419; also Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition As History (London: James Currey Ltd., 1985).

2. The various occasions for consulting Obeopha in Urhobo area, are outlined by Sam Eriwo, 'Epha: Divination System Among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta', African Notes, 8, 1 (1979A), pp.21-25.

3. cf. G.O.M. Tasie, op. cit., p.58.

4. According to N.F.F.P. Newns, Assistant District Officer, in his Intelligent Report about Epie-Atissa in 1935, the Niger Company established a factory at Yenagoa in 1911, for the purpose of dealing in Oil Palm Produce. The factory was established on a piece of land owned by a family called Fankile, to which Chief Mabinton is maternally connected. He now occupies the building formerly occupied by the Agent. Thus, his involvement in the oil mill factory in 1985, was probably intended to be a restoration of the past.

5. See Elechi Amadi, Ethics in Nigerian Culture (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., 1982), p.11; also E. Ilogu, Christianity and Igbo Culture (Lagos: 1974), p.16.

6. N.A. Fadipe, The Sociology of the Yoruba (Ibadan: 1970), p.245; emphasizes how widespread the Ogboni secret society is in all parts of Yorubaland, and the fact that it is now practically in all parts of Nigeria. Elechi Amadi, op. cit. pp.8-9, outlines some of the functions of this society, and explains why the Federal Military Government decreed in 1977, that civil servants "should renounce their membership or quit public service". According to E.M. McClelland, op. cit., Ifa is closely associated with Ogboni, as with Sango, thus further emphasizing the Yoruba influence.

7. See pp.257ff; for an expanded discussion on the Epie-Atissa concept of the causes of misfortune, a subject that cannot be exhaustively treated in this thesis. Therefore what is presented may be further developed in due course.



8. For details, see The Challenge of Change: Collected Speeches of President Shehu Shagari (Lagos: Super Colour Productions (Nigeria) Limited, 1980). p.52.

9. Again, see The Challenge of Change, Ibid., pp. 149-152, in which during the launching of the programme called, 'Green Revolution' in Nigeria, on April 14, 1980, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, President of Nigeria at the time, appointed a Council on the Green Revolution and gave the members their specific functions. It was his view that "while agriculture must perform its traditional role of supplying raw materials for agro-allied industries, the industrial sector must provide fertilisers, agricultural machinery, pesticides, and processing facilities" (p.149). The obvious intention was to revolutionize agriculture in Nigeria. But in reality, it was only a dream that gave the people a false hope.

10. cf. Anthony Kirk-Greene and Douglas Rimmer, Nigeria Since 1970, A Political and Economic Outline (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), pp.73-74.

11. See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande, (Oxford: 1976) pp.33ff., in which he discusses how sufferers of misfortunes among the Azande would always "seek for witches among their enemies".

12. cf. Elechi Amadi, Ethics in Nigerian Culture, op. cit., p.71; also see J.D.Y. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.183, on similar views.

13. Elechi Amadi, op. cit., p.71.

14. Edmund Ilogu, Christianity and Ibo Culture, op. cit., p.53.

15. The reason for this confession is because it is a 'taboo', isini-agugulu for a woman to climb upon a man during sexual intercourse. People in Epie-Atissa resent it probably because the action implies a reversal of sexual roles, or sexual perversion. Furthermore, this could be another way in which sexual discrimination is expressed. In a community where men play and perform a domineering role, women should not be seen as performing any role that is specifically meant for men. Hence, according to Edmund Ilogu, Christianity and Ibo Culture, op. cit., p.125, it is an offence against 'the Iboland', locally called omenani, and a prohibition for a "wife throwing the husband on the ground during a fight". Women are also prohibited from wearing trousers, for the same reason.

16. Garri is a food substance prepared from cassava, and it has the semblance of ground rice. It is widely eaten in Nigeria and in most countries in West Africa. It is usually sold wholesale in bags by the producers to the retailers.

17. See K.L. Little, 'The Role of the Secret Society in Cultural Specialization', American Anthropologist, 51 (1949), p.199; also see R.E. Dennet, 'The Ogboni Societies in Nigeria', Journal of the African Society, 16 (1916-17), pp.16-29.
18. cf. Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religion', Journal of Religion in Africa, 4, (1971/72), p.174.
19. The problem of miscarriage is not limited to Epie-Atissa only. According to John Beattie, 'Divination in Bunyoro, Uganda', Sociologus, N.F. 13-14 (1964), p.45, women in Bunyoro experienced several miscarriages, so they also consulted diviners quite frequently to discover the reason. It is a common practice in the Niger Delta.
20. P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, Their Religion and Customs (London: The Sheldon Press, 1930), p.327.
21. Idem.
22. Major Arthur Glyn Leonard, The Lower Niger And Its Tribes (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1906), p.145.
23. See H.W. Turner, African Independent Church, The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 124ff. for details. The part such prayer houses play in the lives of some people in Epie-Atissa who go to the diviners, will be discussed on pp.287ff.
24. H.W. Turner, op. cit., p.81.
25. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, God is Yoruba Belief (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1962), p.135.
26. Ibid., p.119. Also see E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba (London: Ethnographica, 1982), p.62, where he thinks "descriptions of the omens and speculation about their cause have overtones of terror", especially in Ifa poetry.
27. For details about the relationship between dreams and omens, and cosmology in Africa, see, P.R. McKenzie's unpublished 'Nineteenth-Century, Yoruba Religion', presented recently in a conference on, 'Dreaming and Cosmology in Africa' (Leicester University, 1986). In that paper, he gave an overview of traditional dreams and visions connected with evil omen, and predictive dreams; crisis dreams, sickness dreams, warning dreams, conversion dreams, etc.; all of which are related to the cosmology. The same could be said of Evans-Pritchard's analysis of 'witchcraft dreams in the Azande', in Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande, op. cit., pp.230-235; John Ferguson, The Religions of the Roman Empire, op. cit., pp.154-156; P.E. Easterling and J.V. Meier, Greek Religion and Society, op. cit. pp.22-24.

28. What is stated here is as a result of recent findings in the Niger Delta expressed by a great number of women, both married and unmarried, as a related aspect of this research. It is therefore a very widespread problem, which has brought about the concept of marital relationship with water spirits or mermaid.
29. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, op. cit., p.234.
30. Idem
31. See Christine Obbo, African Women, Their Struggle for Economic Independence (London: Zed Press, 1980), p.40; also see Edwin Ardener, 'Belief and the Problem of Women', in J.S. LaFontaine (ed.), The Interpretation of Ritual (London: Tavistock, 1972); Esther Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970); Denise Paul (ed.), Women in Tropical Africa, trans. by H.M. Wright (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Kathleen A. Staudt and Jane S. Jaquette (eds.), Women in Developing Countries, A Policy Focus (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982); Jean O'Barr, Third World Women: Factors in their Changing Status (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University International Studies, 1976); Helvi Sipila, 'The changing Role of Women in the Developing Regions of the World', Journal of International Affairs, 30, 2, (1966/77), pp.183-190.
32. Edmund Ilogu, Christianity and Ibo Culture, op. cit., p.39.
33. cf. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief, op. cit., pp.80-81.
34. Here the pioneering works of Evans-Pritchard (1937), C. Kluckhohn, Navaho Witchcraft (Cambridge, Mass.; Peabody Museum, 1944); and M. Marwick, 'The Social Context of Cewa Witch Beliefs', Africa, 22 (1952), pp.120-135, 215-253, are noteworthy because, according to I.M. Lewis, 'Spirit Possession and Deprivation Cults', Men, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, N.S. 1 (1968), pp.308-309, the basis for their studies of Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery anthropologically, was "to examine in detail the social nexus in which jealousies, enmities, and frustrations between rivals are transmitted into accusations of witchcraft and sorcery" (p.309). What occurs in Epie-Atissa may support their views.
35. See P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, op. cit., p.21, in which he refers to the practice of the veneration of the land, in terms of 'Ijaw Earth Goddess'. Thus, Utoken is regarded as 'earth goddess'.
36. G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.11.
37. cf. H.W. Turner, African Independent Church, op. cit., pp.108-109; also see, S.A. Fefegha, 'Minha As An Aspect of Sacrifice in Ancient Israel', M. Phil. Thesis,

School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies, University of Liverpool (1981), p.13, in which he gave a relevant information about 'incense', which was commonly called 'frankincense', a vegetable product in Ancient Israel. The original home of this product was Arabia and Somaliland, during which time it equalled gold in commercial and economic importance. Although it had various uses, it was used in Israel mainly for offerings because of its sweet smell. When burnt, its sweet smell acted as fragrance which eliminated and effectively dealt with odours caused by sacrificial animals etc. It was never originally intended to drive away evil spirits and witches, as expressed by adherents of the Aladura Church and other related prayer houses. For more details, also see J.B. Brown, Journal of Semitic Studies xxx (1980), pp.16-20; J.I. Miller, The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC to AD 641, (Oxford: 1969), pp. 102-105; H.N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, Plants of the Bible (New York: 1952), pp.56-59, 82-84; Gus W. Van Beek, 'Frankincense and Myrrh', Biblical Archaeology, xxiii (1960), pp.70-95.

38. H.W. Turner, op. cit., p.84.
39. Ibid., p.107.
40. Idem.
41. Idem.
42. See Ulli Beier, 'The Egungun Cult', Nigeria, 5 (1956), p.389.
43. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., p.73.
44. cf. J.D.Y. Peel, Aladura, A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.118.
45. G.O.M. Tasie, Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) p.190. Also see Ulli Beier, op. cit. p.389.
46. H.W. Turner, op. cit., p.85.
47. J.A. Omoyaluwo, Cherubim and Seraphim, The History of an African Independent Church, (London: Nok Publishers International, 1982), p.95.
48. cf. J.R. Hinnel(ed.), The Penguin Dictionary of Religions, op. cit., p.352.
49. Idem.
50. See Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religion', Journal of Religion in Africa, 4, (1971/72), pp.174-175, for similar ideas about Ga Women Mediums in Ghana.
51. Ibid., p.176.

52. Ibid., p.177.
53. George K. Park, 'Divination and its Social Contexts', Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1963), 93, p.207.
54. Idem.
55. For details concerning evil effects of LSD and other related drugs like marijuana, see, Raziel Abelson, et. al., 'Psychedelics and Religion: A Symposium', in the Humanist (1967), pp.153-156, 190-191. Also A.C. Lehman, et. al., Magic, Witchcraft and Religion, op. cit., pp. 138-142.
56. cf. Elechi Amadi, Ethics in Nigerian Culture, op. cit., p.8.
57. As indicated by Elechi Amadi, op. cit., pp.82-93, awuf, is the common name given to the various aspects of "bribery, corruption or any gain obtained through trickery, dishonesty or sharp practice" in Nigeria.
58. Clifford Geertz, 'Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example', American Anthropologist, 59, (1957), pp.33-34.
59. See Mary Douglas, 'Taboo', in Richard Cavendish (ed.), Man, Myth and Magic (London: 1979), vol. 20, pp.2767-71, for details on taboo, its meaning and related implications.
60. See E. Boloji Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., pp.12-13.
61. Philip E. Leis, 'Collective Sentiments' in Ijaw Divination', Journal of the Folklore Institute, 1, 3 (1964), pp.176-177.
62. cf. Victor W. Turner, Nde<sup>b</sup> Divination, Its Symbolism and Techniques (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961) p.14.

## CHAPTER 5

### EPIE-ATISSA COSMOLOGY AND DIVINATION

#### Epie-Atissa Cosmology

As earlier indicated, diviners in Epie-Atissa are people who are familiar with the traditions and customs of the people, and the things that matter in the cosmology and their meanings (see above, pp.67f). It is therefore the purpose of this chapter to investigate Epie-Atissa cosmology and its effect on divination.

People in Epie-Atissa generally believe in a supreme God, called Izibe who is the creator of heaven and earth, and all things including, idiomu 'divinities'. As the creator, he therefore controls the destiny of man and his creatures.. The word 'destiny' could be locally translated as, isini-pulu-yem, meaning 'that which was asked for'. In other words, after having created man, everybody was allowed to express a wish, during which some asked for riches, and all the good things in life such as education, peace, joy, etc. These are the people who came with 'good luck', adutom-vie, meaning, 'forehead that is good'. But others asked for things evil, like poverty, barrenness, hardship, etc. These they call 'bad luck', adutom-didieli, meaning 'forehead that is bad'. Thus, when someone's 'forehead is good', adutom-vie, whatever he does on earth prospers. For example, if he is a farmer or fisherman, which are two of

the most important occupations in the Niger Delta, he does not have to work too hard in order to gain success.

In this way, man's 'luck', adutomu, 'forehead', is related to his 'destiny', isini-pulu-yem, which is controlled by Izibe, 'God'. This therefore corresponds with the Yoruba concept of fate, in which 'luck' is associated with 'destiny'.<sup>1</sup> And like the Yoruba, people in Epie-Atissa, therefore "have a strong belief in pre-destination".<sup>2</sup> The difference however is that while the Yoruba concept of predestination known as ori is "always associated with the inner head",<sup>3</sup> that of Epie-Atissa is associated with 'forehead', adutomu not the 'inner head'. But in both cases, it is believed that destiny is something which every man had received from God, whether good or bad. Attempts could be made to change it, if one was not satisfied with one's destiny. This is done through the divinities, who are the intermediaries of Izibe, hence the elaborate system of divination which is a means of finding out from the 'divinities', idiomu, about what would be the proper approach.

There is a demarcation between 'God', Izibe, and his creatures. While Izibe inhabits what is regarded as the high heavens, locally called Okunu, the creatures live on the earth, called Uto. The various parts of the earth make up what they call Okpo, 'the world'. Izibe, 'God' does not inhabit the high heavens, Okunu, alone. He shares his abode with a number of luminaries called Otoroto, 'moon' and ugen,

'the stars', which shine at night; and uvon, 'the sun', which shines during the day. It is believed that because of man's wicked ways, Izibē gets angry with man from time to time. When he could no longer bear with man, he sends uvon, 'sun', either to destroy or to warn mankind. Then uvon acting as his messenger comes down from the sky, upon the earth in the form of agbalala, 'thunderbolt', striking down and destroying whatever may stand in the way. This view was expressed by Chief S.M. Ezekiel, Obeneken of Okaka (see pp.42-43). This corresponds with what is regarded among the Yorubas as Sango, 'the wrath of God', and among the Ibos as Amadioho, 'the Thunder God', and the Kalabaris call it so-alagba, 'sky gun'.<sup>4</sup> According to Yoruba belief, so dreadful is the anger of God that when demonstrated by Sango in the form of lightning, its force and noise send "a ripple of fear through us, by threatening us with the arbitrary finality of God's wrath".<sup>5</sup> The difference however is that there is no corresponding divinity to Sango in Epie-Atissa. But there are certain 'nature-doctors', onyo-obu, who may occasionally exhibit the ability to control agbalala, 'thunder', which could be sent either to destroy an enemy and his property, or be directed to fall far away from people.

There is no particular creation myth in Epie-Atissa as there is especially among the Ibos, who refer to 'the sun', Anyanwu and 'moon', Onwa as messengers created by 'God', Chukwu. These have to "travel across the sky, to bring Him back news of what happens on earth".<sup>6</sup> People in Epie-Atissa



believe that Izibe created all things but how this was done is unknown, neither does anyone know how and who created Izibe. But there is a myth about the 'moon', otoroto, and its power to give light to the whole earth at night. This myth states that many years ago, two prominent wrestling champions representing two communities met for a wrestling match. The champions were so evenly matched that no-one could separate them. They wrestled until they vanished into the 'moon', otoroto, thus causing it to radiate the power and strength of two great wrestling champions. People sometimes think the images of these two persons could be seen in the moon especially during certain nights when it shines brightest. The new moon, especially in its crescent form is usually a source of great delight to little children in Epie-Atissa. This writer also experienced this personally as a little child because it heralds the beginning of the natural supply of light at night to people who live in some villages in Epie-Atissa where there is no electricity. In such villages, the beginning of the new moon till when it is fully developed, especially during the dry season preceding Christmas, marked the period when people usually assembled in groups outside, singing and dancing to traditional tunes, and also to enjoy stories told by the more elderly men and such moonlight occasions constitute precious recreational moments and help to make the night less boring. The 'rains', ede are therefore dreaded because they cause the moon to disappear, leaving the atmosphere constantly wet and damp.

The view has been expressed by Tasie that some people in the Niger Delta sometimes worship the new moon hoping to tap the fresh power and radiance. This of course, is not a known practice in Epie-Atissa. But the Epie-Atissa legend about the two wrestling champions in the moon further states that somehow, one of them became female, so they got married,<sup>7</sup> and gave birth to several children called ugen, 'the stars'. They all illuminate the radiance of otoroto, moon, their parents and constitute the celestial bodies. It is believed that people venerate the celestial bodies, but again there is no evidence of this in Epie-Atissa. Nonetheless, there are religious organizations that go by the name of 'Celestial Church', or 'Morning Star', and the like in other parts of Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

The 'earth', uto is the abode of 'man'. Although the word edibe applies generically to all human beings in general, whether 'male', omosi, 'female', afina, 'old', okpom, and 'young', isoou, there is nevertheless a distinction made, in which someone of worth is known as ekenmu-edibe, meaning 'proper or whole person', while the ordinary person is simply called edibe, 'person'. Thus a highly educated person or a person of great wealth or worth in society will be placed in the former category, while a pauper will fall in the latter category. While man has dominion over the 'animals', anamu, the 'birds', efeni in the air, and the 'fish', eseni in the water, he is under the sway of Izibe, 'God' in heaven and other entities which constitute the 'spirit' world, known as osio. It was discovered from

personal experience and interviews in Epie-Atissa that the abode of these spirits is unknown, because they are invisible. They believe that spirits do not have bodies; hence they cannot be seen. But man lives in a body, called oju; he therefore occupies a material world known as isini, which has the literal translation of, 'thing'. Therefore people in Epie-Atissa would agree with the view expressed by Horton that man can "be seen and touched by anyone suitably positioned to do so",<sup>9</sup> admired and appreciated, and either loved or hated. It is only after 'death', uwu, that man himself becomes osio, 'spirit', but still retaining some of the characteristics and traits of a living being, with particular reference to being hungry, therefore wishing to eat; angry, hence needing appeasement, and also the needs for love and care.<sup>10</sup>

Since 'God', Izibe is far away in heaven, it is believed that he cannot be easily reached. Hence the 'deity' idiomu, depicted in the form of a human being, as is the case of Orisa at Akaba, is worshipped or venerated. This act is technically known as kene, 'to worship' or 'venerate'. In order to do so effectively, the idiomu is first given a name because all human beings have names. The name then dictates the functions and attributes, including the sex. Again certain events in the community or in the life of an individual may also dictate the type of idiomu required. Thus when Akaba needed help desperately to stop the high rate of infant mortality, including the activities of witchcraft, and protection from their enemies, the deity

called Orisa sufficed. In the times of war, Aruku-egene sufficed at Akaba, and Aruku-eken at Famgbe. Then these together with Utoken that took care of the ancestral and other related communal matters, became known as community 'deities' or idiomu-eken. These are also regarded as idiomu-okunu, 'land or earth deities', and others which are primarily individual deities which have their abode in the water are known as 'water deities', idiomu-amini or more specifically 'mermaid'. Thus while the idiomu okunu are concerned mostly with the affairs of the community in general, idiomu-amini are rather concerned with the development and promotion of individual skills of their mediums.<sup>11</sup>

Individual mediums may contract marriage with their individual deities; such that a male medium may marry his female idiomu in the spirit world, together with all the other physical wives whom he may already have. Similarly, a female medium may also marry her male counterpart in the spirit world, in addition to her present physical husband. The only thing which may disturb this relationship is 'death', uwu, which is the only way one can be venerated as an ancestor, to whom libations of kaikai, 'palm-gin', may be offered. Talbot emphasizes the importance of this when he expresses the fact that in the Niger Delta, "the ancestral spirits still play their part in the life of the community, passing at will from one place to another and helping in such mundane matters as trading ventures and catching of plentiful hauls of fish".<sup>12</sup> Thus as was indicated in p.72,

Epie-Atissa concept of Izibe, 'God' may include all that comprise the spirit world, already mentioned. Certain persons who belong in the school of thought of Chief Ezekiel of Okaka (see above, Chapter 1, p.42) think all these forces in the spirit world grouped together under 'deities', idiomu, are regarded as having the same parents with Izibe, 'God'. According to this view, he who 'created' or 'gave birth' to 'God', also created the deities. But Izibe is the elder brother, so he is more powerful and supreme. As a result 'God' then created man and all other creatures. Hence while God and the deities inhabit the spirit world, man and all the other created 'things', isini occupy the material world. But Christianity and education have since helped to change this view.

Prophet Orioko Dangolo, priest of Epie-Bottle divination at Kpansia, is of the opinion that the 'spirits', osio, in the 'spirit world', eken-gbani-osio influence the events and lives of people in the 'physical world', okpo. He also believes that spirits are disembodied living entities who inhabit the spirit world located 'under the earth', ede-uto, 'above the earth', okunu, and 'around the earth', okpo. The spirits have eternal existence, so they can assume bodies of man, animal or plant, and can live in both the physical and spiritual world. They live in organized societies in which the world of pure spirits is ruled either by Izibe, 'God' or 'Satan', osio-didieli. But the world of 'ancestors' inibudu, or 'souls of the dead', eken-gbani-wem, are ruled by entities appointed by them, such as Utoken. Thus

everything about an 'ancestor', inibudu is embodied in Utoken.

It is further believed that while the spirit world is permanent, the physical world is always changing, therefore very insecure. As a result, there is always a constant increase in population in the spirit world, as man, beast and plant life return to the parent spirit world from where they came to the physical world. Thus man's life is temporary while spirits are permanent beings, having automatic knowledge, indicating one of the major differences between spirits and human beings. However, Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe thinks man or human being has to be taught. He grows from youth to old age, after which he dies. Thus, while man dies, spirits do not die. They are adult beings, who can assume any form, and/or gender at will. On the contrary, man has a fixed form. Hence it is believed that the spirits have power and authority over man, and could harm or heal men; give life to man or kill him. Therefore our forefathers tried all they could to gain the favour of the spirits by sacrifices meant to appease them. For them, they knew they would die some day and join the spirit world, where they would happily remain to superintend over the events of the households which have been left on earth. But while he lived, he had authority to do anything to protect and to preserve himself, even if it meant killing in order to do so. The preservation of life was therefore considered to be more important than riches.<sup>13</sup> This may account for the great number of requests made to Orisa at

Akaba for protection, and the amount of money spent in doing so, including all the requests for the killings of enemies, and the payments thereof, as already discussed in Chapter 4. Thus, in Epie-Atissa cosmology, life comes from Izibe, and it continues after death, in the sense that when a man dies, he turns into a spirit entity and joins the spirit-world, known in Epie-Atissa as inibudu.

### Divination and Deities

There are several deities in Epie-Atissa, some <sup>are</sup> communal <sup>while</sup> others are individual. Collectively they constitute a pantheon, and the services of these also dictate which type of divination is applicable, whether communal or individual. But by far the most wide spread deity which also superintends over all ancestral and related affairs of the community, and can be found in every town or village in Epie-Atissa and other parts of the Niger Delta, is the deity called Utoken, 'the land goddess'. This is the deity that has the greatest influence over the cosmological views of people in Epie-Atissa and also <sup>regarding</sup> matters connected with divination. The extent to which this is the case will now be examined.

### Utoken at Obogoro

Since it is held that Utoken performs identical functions in whatever place it is venerated, only the views of two of the most experienced and elderly priests of Utoken in two different communities in Atissa are discussed here. The first person is Mr. Dunkutu Tommy Ewili, who has been chief priest of Utoken for 35 years at the village of Obogoro. He is a widower of about 75 years old. He was interviewed together with his assistant priest, Mr. Augustus Amabopere, in the chief priest's residence on 12th August, 1985. Stressing the importance of Utoken, Mr. Amabopere, acting as the spokesman, indicated that Izibe, 'God' created uto, 'land', before creating 'man', edibe. Wherever man finds a dwelling place, he builds his 'home', ufamu, 'village or town', eken, on the 'land', uto hence the importance of Utoken. Every town or village therefore has Utoken, which in Epie-Atissa is regarded as 'deity', idiomu, which constitute the ancestors 'venerated', kene, because they are concerned with the well-being of the community as a whole.

As idiomu, Utoken does not want to accept the blame for the evils done by other people. Their sins cannot be hidden because Utoken already knows all about their thoughts and plans in a divine way, and would not fail to deal with them. Thus, except the matter is quickly treated and confessed, the person may fall ill and die. Then Utoken will reveal himself through aganaga divination that he killed the evil



doer, and also pinpoint the particular evils the person had committed, especially if he had practised 'witchcraft', ida. Having done this, it is then the duty of the community to show appreciation later to Utoken with drinks and related sacrifices for the purpose of thanksgiving for having protected the community. This then serves as a deterrent measure for others. The main function of the Utoken therefore is the protection of the community against evil,<sup>14</sup> and linked with it are the aganaga and ugbolo methods of divination, which have been discussed.

Explaining how Utoken became idiomu, Mr. Augustus Amabopere said, from times of old, after occupying a place, the forefathers encircled a particular location in the village with sticks which they called Utoken. Women were generally prohibited from entering into it. Only men were allowed to go in there to 'venerate and worship', kene Utoken, during which 'libations', dibeze-isini, of palm wine are offered. Thus, when the elders of the community assembled to venerate anything with all the associated rituals, for which the term, kene is used, that thing becomes idiomu, 'deity', according to the norms of Epie-Atissa society. As a necessary aspect of kene, 'fowl', efeni, or 'goat', enimegen, may be slaughtered. The magnitude of the occasion dictates which of the two are slaughtered. An 'animal', anamu may be slaughtered if the festivity was such that the entire community participated; in which case it must take place on the heathens' sabbath day, called ede-wiye-deke. But the sacrifice will be preceded by some rituals in which

Utoken is consulted first of all, by means of aganaga divination.

On a particular occasion, the elders inform Utoken by means of aganaga divination that a day has been fixed upon which an animal will be slaughtered for its 'veneration', kene. The purpose is to ensure that everything is done with the approval of Utoken and that the animal will be favourably accepted when slaughtered. After having slaughtered the animal, part of the blood is drained into the ground and the balance is used in a 'covenant ceremony', ovuo, that is believed to animate Utoken to the extent that nobody could spill human blood by whatever method, in the community without incurring the wrath of Utoken. But before the animal is slaughtered, all the elders present ceremoniously lay their hands on the goat asking it to bare the 'sins', odieli of the community. In this way, the animal becomes a scape-goat for the entire community. This contrasts with the 'lizard', ogeregere, used for the same purpose by Orisa in connection with Chief Macauley Saife (see above, Chapter 2. p.106), and also by Better Wilson in igilasi divination (see above, Chapter 3, p.211). It also contrasts with the practice in Western Nigeria where a 'dog', aje is slaughtered instead of a 'goat', ewure, when Ogun, "one of the oldest orisa in the Yoruba pantheon"<sup>15</sup> is worshipped. But in all cases, emphasis is placed on the importance of the 'blood', eye, which implies the concept of 'the scape-goat'.

After the goat has been ritually slaughtered, it is cooked at the ugula, 'shrine' of Utoken with 'plantain', abanna. In the case of Ogun worship in Yoruba area, the 'dog', ajá, is prepared in a dish with 'yam', isa, instead of 'plantain', oyede.<sup>16</sup> Yam is not used during such ceremonies in Epie-Atissa partly because they share the view expressed by Talbot that "no priest may eat new yams"<sup>17</sup> until 'the ceremonies for New Year', known as eke adia-fa have been performed. The other reason is that some people avoid eating yam altogether, as a necessary requirement for their priestly office.<sup>18</sup> But 'plantain', abanna is eaten all the year round by everybody.<sup>19</sup> The meal at the ugula of Utoken is never eaten until the chief priest has been given his special share. This consists of the 'breast', uvun, 'the head', utomu, 'intestines', idiin-fan, meaning, 'thread in the stomach', 'the heart', evebu, 'liver', odiom and 'tail', ukpasa. In the case of a chicken, then the 'gizzard', commonly regarded as anamu onyo-gene, meaning, 'big man's meat', is given to the chief priest, including the 'liver', odiom, and other important parts. The chief priest is well taken care of during such occasions because he receives no fixed salary, but he suffers most for the community because all problems are sent to him. It is therefore expedient to give him the best part of such meals during all such occasions as a mark of respect and appreciation. He also gains recognition this way, thus being encouraged to work harder in order to protect the tradition of the people.

At Obogoro, therefore, Utoken is regarded as the most important idiomu, 'deity', to which all other deities give respect and obey. The chief priest of Utoken is therefore empowered to assemble the priests of all the deities to deliberate about the affairs of the community. As the chief priest of Utoken, he therefore carries all the burdens of the entire community. Functionally, people may go to Utoken to solicit for material prosperity, children and long life. Women who have been blessed with children by Utoken often return to give thanks in their own way, especially after having had a safe delivery.

#### Utoken at Ogu

Perhaps the story about Utoken at Ogu gives a more complete picture about how this deity is established in a village. According to Mr. Andusugurugha Benson Abadiofoni, chief priest of Utoken, who was interviewed on 23rd October, 1985, he was appointed to the post in 1973, following the death of the former priest called Akpaigbe. A new Utoken had to be established then because the village of Ogu was compelled by circumstances to move from its original site to a new site early in 1972. This movement was caused by the fact that a canal which they dug near the village some time ago eroded during high flood and became part of a big river. This separated the village from the mainland, causing it to become an island in the middle of the river. This situation caused the people to migrate from their previous location in order to settle in a new place. This also necessitated

their having to set up Utoken afresh in their new location. Since this was not effected quickly enough, it caused the wrath of the ancestors, and many people died in the process.

The chief priest of Utoken at Ogu, in addition to the use of aganaga or ugbolo divination with regard to the worship of Utoken, also respects the views of some well known female diviners in the community, such as Edegbesi and Igugu and three powerful priestesses, namely: Mrs. Miederi Abadiofoni, wife of the chief priest, and priestess of his personal deity called lokobide, Mrs. Zikumona Edegbesi, priestess of Idiama divination, and Mrs. Okpofagha, priestess of another idiomu. These, including Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi, priestess of Orueperemo, are respected because they are able to reveal the will of the gods in connection with any given problem, hence people elsewhere also rely on their divinatory services, at the private, individual levels. The chief priest of Utoken, indeed leads with his predominantly male cultic personnel in the worship of Utoken, the communal deity. Nonetheless, as a result of this recognition accorded to women diviners, other women who are also interested in gaining authority and power, have enrolled under these 'cultic mothers', as 'disciples', locally known as igbani-agbadubo, or 'cultic daughters'. This has helped to establish a 'deities cult' in the area. This is comparable to what obtains among the Ga of South-Eastern Ghana, where mediumship has been regarded, especially among the women as "the most powerful and one of the most prestigious occupations open to women".<sup>20</sup> Some of

the benefits that are acquired by such women will be discussed (see below, Chapter 6, pp.370-372).

#### Sweeping the Village:

Following consultations with the women at Ogu, regarding the establishment of Utoken in their new site, the advice was given that all the pollution and defilement, in connection with the old site, such as evil medicines and charms, including all the 'bad deities', idiomu-dieli, should remain with the old site. All things evil, including 'evil children', imo-didieli, should remain there as well. But only 'good children', imo-vie, 'money', isili, 'long life', utom-kpokpo, and the gift of 'prominent men and women', igbani-utom-gene, should be encouraged in the new site. These requirements therefore constituted the bases for their setting up a new Utoken at Ogu under the leadership of Mr. Abadiofoni, in 1973. With the approval of Chief Anthony Marla Joel Abasi, the ebeneken of Ogu, it was agreed that as a necessary aspect of establishing Utoken in the new site, the entire village must first be 'swept', gbere, with a view to removing every pollution. As a communal venture, money was collected from all the men and women in the community, with which they purchased drinks and other sacrificial items. In order to fix a suitable day for the ceremony, the seers and diviners already mentioned were consulted, and 1st January, 1973, being the New Year's day, was selected. This day was declared as the most important day in the history of the village now in its new site, so everybody was required to attend the ceremony in the village square. It was a very

colourful and festive occasion during which people drank, danced and made merry, and finally, all participated 'to sweep', gbere the village. This ceremony which has become an annual event performed on every 'New Year's Day', ede-ukpe-fa, at Ogu, is called eke-gbere-eken, meaning the 'ceremony of sweeping the village'. This comprises four main aspects.

The first aspect is the symbolic carving of a miniature canoe symbolically manned by 12 'persons', who are also symbolically carved. This miniature canoe is usually carved with wood from the umbrella tree, because it is light and therefore floats easily in the river to which all things 'swept' are symbolically thrown.

Secondly, once these carvings are ready, the whole community assemble at the village square to express their wishes and also perform certain required invocations. Thirdly, everybody is then supplied with two items by the devotees of Utoken, namely: 'ashes', locally called iwofu-tan-gbala, and 'palm nuts', ibi. These items are used during the 'invocation' ritual, known as 'wali-isini'. The fourth and the final aspect is the wali-isini or the 'invocation ritual' itself.

During the invocation ritual, everybody is required to say:

Nothing evil should come to this village.  
Therefore, should I practice 'witch-craft', ida, I  
should die. If I have 'evil-medicine', ibi-dieli,

'I should die', me wu. Otherwise, we all want 'good children', imo-vie, and 'long life', utom-kpokpo. May I prosper in my farming, and let me experience 'riches', udede. Let good things happen to this village. Anything evil should pass me bye.

Each person now picks up a 'palm nut', ibi, rubs it with 'ashes', iwofu-tan-agbala, taking it round his or her head, once; after which the nuts are put into the miniature canoe. But, realizing that the population of Ogu is about 2000, and that a single miniature canoe may not be big enough to contain so many nuts, two miniature canoes were therefore provided. One was given to the men, and the other to the women. They are then put into two normal canoes; one manned by men, and the other by women. Fresh palm fronds are then used to decorate the canoes, and just before they push off to the river, all the women in the community are required to perform their own separate ritual of wali-isini, 'invocation', each rounding her head with a palm-nut, saying:

My head is not among. I do not want evil. I do not want to cry again. I have cried enough, and I am now tired of crying. No-one should die again in this village. We want good things in this village. Therefore, let this village experience good success, riches and prosperity this year. Let good children, good health and long life be the blessings of this village.

It is after this that two men and two women are specially selected to convey the miniature canoes to the waterside.





**PLATE 46** - Chief Andusugurugha  
Abadiofoni, priest of Utoken at Ogu,  
in his full priestly regalia.

**PLATE 47** - Chief Andusugurugha  
Abadiofoni, priest of Utoken at Ogu,  
in his full priestly regalia. Note  
some of the things that constitute  
his full regalia.

**PLATE 48** - Chief Marla Abasi,  
ebeneken of Ogu, attired in red,  
with a red cap and fan made from  
ostrich feathers, and his assistant,  
Chief Adugu Simangi.

As they lead the way, the whole village will then sing and dance behind them through the village, from one end to the other, and then to the waterside. They are taken down the river in the normal canoes already mentioned, and thrown away. After this, then drinks are freely served. The ceremony continues the following day, during which all the women mediums of the various idiomu in the community dance, perform, worship and venerate Utoken. During this occasion, the chief priest of Utoken, who is also priest of his personal idiomu called odumu, 'python', usually sits on the high table in his full regalia (see Plates 46 and 47), flanked by his subordinates. The ebeneken, also sits, flanked by his subordinates (see Plate 48, in which Chief Marla Abasi, the ebeneken, is attired in red, with a red cap and a fan made of ostrich feathers, to the left, and his subordinate, Chief Adugu Simangi, to the right). Usually, when fully attired, the chief priest of Utoken pins a white eagle's feather on his head. But this feather is not pinned whenever the women are dancing for Utoken, because it is a peaceful and happy occasion; not of war. Nevertheless, it is still mandatory that he fulfils the ritual of rounding the right eye with chalk, known as 'poko-utiin', or 'poko-adu', and cover his head with the red cap. His fan is that of solid leather, instead of feathers, like that of the ebeneken; he holds his walking stick in his right hand, and the fan in his left, with a mantle round his neck. The rest of him is always white (see Plate 47). His authority as chief priest of Utoken is therefore vested in his



**PLATE 49** - Two female mediums, Mrs. Janet Adibagha, priestess of odum-qbirigbiri, 'python', and Mrs. Mina Igbomu, priestess of Benikurukuru, dressed ready for the annual ceremony of Utoken festival, at Ogu.

regalia.

Once seated in his full regalia, all the priestesses of the various deities in the community will dance, then kneel down before him, and shake hands with him, in turn. This is to acknowledge the supremacy of Utoken above all other deities in the entire village of Ogu (see Plate 49, showing two mediums fully dressed, ready to dance. Seated on the right is Mrs. Janet Adibagha, wife of a retired schoolmaster, and priestess of two deities, male and female. The male is called odum-gbirigbiri, which is 'python', and the female is called, odum-sana-idirigebe, also 'python'. On the left is Mrs. Mina Igbomu, priestess of benikukkuru). The chief priest is of the opinion that once these ceremonies are properly done, and Utoken given its due honour and recognition, things get on very well with the community during the whole of that year. Men and women could then farm and pursue their various professions in peace, and deaths <sup>would be</sup> also minimised.

This is a clear example in Epie-Atissa, where as mentioned by Chieka Ifemesia with particular reference to the Igbo, religion is "practised not just for the spiritual and physical benefit of an individual or his immediate kin, but for the well-being of all within the purview of the celebrant".<sup>21</sup> This corresponds with the Epie-Atissa view because this description of the supremacy of Utoken at Ogu, which in actual fact is 'Mother Earth' or 'the Earth Deity',

and the way it is worshipped by the whole community, shows that this cult is central in understanding Epie-Atissa cosmology. This is specially because it is concerned with life, death and the after-life. Epie-Atissa culture then is held together by an understanding of the concept of inibudu. Hence, like that of the Ibos, "the earth was far and away the most important single factor in the many-sided life of the traditional"<sup>22</sup> Epië-Atissa community. Consequently, the people think that prosperity of the entire community or otherwise depends on the proper worship of this deity, as portrayed in the functions and taboos of this cult.

### Symbolism / Interpretation:

It is necessary to attempt an interpretation of the significance of 'ashes', iwofu-tan-qbala, 'palm-kernel nuts', ibi, and 'palm fronds', imimi, used in the eke-gbere-eken or 'the ceremony of sweeping the village', just discussed. The use of 'ashes' in this ceremony is significant because as the residue of firewood, they are indicative of the most important source of light, heating and matters relating to energy in every home in Epie-Atissa. In other words, ashes remind the people that the most important source of energy in the home has expired, and hence useless. Ashes therefore represent expired life, which will be the fate of anybody who sinned against Utoken. Bolaji Idowu puts this in the context of "the law of retributive justice"<sup>23</sup> which "operates in such a way as to bring back the reward of wickedness, not only upon the wicked, but also upon his offspring".<sup>24</sup> In this respect,

Idowu advances the opinion that "the ashes blow after the person who throws them".<sup>25</sup> This is portrayed in the general invocation, which indicated that the welfare of any member of Ogu community depended on the person's activities. If anyone was involved in witchcraft and other practices like evil-medicine, such should die; but otherwise he should prosper. Those who want to prosper are therefore likely to perform good deeds, not evil.

The 'palm-nuts', ibi represented the various individuals who were answerable to Utoken for whatever evils committed. The fact that each person picked up a nut, rubbed it with 'ashes', iwofu-tan-gbala, and passed it round the head before putting it into the miniature canoe, indicates individual accountability. Again palm-nut is significant to people in Epie-Atissa because it reminds them of one of their main sources of wealth and subsistence since people in this area are palm cutting.<sup>26</sup> Palm nuts are also used in the divinatory practices of Ifa, in which "the trees from which they are taken have to be propitiated before the nuts are gathered".<sup>27</sup> So important is the palm tree, locally called epi, to Ifa cult that the nuts are used for divining "either whole or split into halves,"<sup>28</sup> and also used during initiation ceremony by burying. Equally important is the palm oil which "is an essential ingredient of libations and is used to pour over the emblems of the deities in the worship of the cults."<sup>29</sup> While Ifa further emphasizes that he eats and drinks of the palm tree, the "palm fronds formed the direct path through which I walked into the world".<sup>30</sup>

As a result, the palm fronds are used to form the background upon which the babalawo, or Ifa priest, performed in the grove during Ifa ceremonies. This is therefore similar to the 'palm fronds', imimi which were used to decorate the canoes which conveyed the miniature canoes containing the nuts, for deposition in the river.

A further significance of the palm tree is that it is the symbol of Utoken at Ogu. This contrasts with the cotton tree which is the symbol of Utoken at Swali (see at Chapter 2, p.144). While in this case it signifies wealth or prosperity in general terms of both material wealth and children, to Ifa cult it shows the link between spirits and nature, and that "the great trees are their favourite haunts".<sup>31</sup> Equally significant are the 'canoes', uko, because they constitute the main form of transportation in the Niger Delta. But when they are decorated with palm fronds, and treated as described, such canoes are deified, hence given a high status and regard. This is probably why Talbot thought canoes were treated as though they had "souls living in the bow",<sup>32</sup> which he called, 'canoe spirit', which the Kalabari chiefs consulted "before setting forth on any venture".<sup>33</sup> Although such is not practised in Epie-Atissa, the canoes so used during Utoken ceremonies would probably be viewed as sacred, therefore set apart for use by Utoken always, comparable to a car reserved for use by an executive.



### Functions of Utoken:

It could thus be seen that Utoken performs various functions in Epie-Atissa. By far the most important function is the preservation, and protection of the whole community. Since most of what pertain to Utoken are linked with divination, it performs a cathartic function, in which and through which society is purged and cleansed.<sup>34</sup> Related to this is the generation of consensus of support<sup>35</sup> in which, as indicated in the case of Ogu, the entire community bowed to recognize the supremacy of the chief priest, whose views in spiritual matters are more regarded than those of the ebeneken. Thus Utoken therefore serves as the rallying point for the community. In times of sickness, mothers brought their sick ones to Utoken for healing, with the promise of the payment of a certain amount of money after recovery. The barren solicited Utoken for children; and others for riches and prosperity in business. In each case, vows were made that payment will be effected in cash or kind once the need has been met.

In place of money therefore, some brought chicken and drinks of which any member of the community who arrived in time may eat. Similarly, drinks were treated in the same way. No single person could consume anything brought to Utoken because it was a community deity, and not a personal one. Therefore whenever drinks were brought to Utoken, it was the duty of the chief priest to assemble as many people as possible, both heathens and Christians, to

participate in consuming them.

Taboos of Utoken:

The taboos of Utoken are the same as those of inibudu, 'the ancestors', because Utoken is the visible representative on earth of the invisible inibudu. In other words, Utoken is the link between the living and the dead, and performs similar roles to those of the ombudsman. As a result, the laws of Utoken are connected with some of the basic ethical and moral problems (see above, Chapter 2, p.109). The main taboo however is that no-one should plan evil against his or her neighbour. Offences regarding sexual intercourse were viewed very seriously. Therefore Utoken made laws against incest. People were not to destroy things forbidden by the entire community. Thus, if the community was forbidden from eating certain birds or animals, probably because they were regarded as totems, then those who contravened it, did so at the risk of their lives. Women and strangers are generally prohibited from going into any shrine of Utoken.

In some of these cases, prompt confessions and the performance of the appropriate rites, would suffice. But this does not apply to killing by whatever method; whether by evil medicines or witchcraft. Once people have killed deliberately through any of these methods, then the person must die as well. In this regard, it is worth noting that the various deities in the community are united concerning the protection of people in the community. Thus, when a particular individual commits any sin which is against the

laws of the land, these deities seem to gang up together in order to eliminate that individual. This solidarity is demonstrated regarding the narrative about Ogu, and 'the gbere eken ceremony', during which all the various mediums bow to recognize the supremacy of Utoken (see at pp.317-318). Similarly, whenever the peace and harmony existing in the community is disrupted, this seems to affect the cosmic forces. Hence, under the leadership of Utoken, all the deities seem to gather their forces together to fight and eliminate that disruptive individual. Having done so, they may then reveal the reasons for their action through the traditional method of aganaga divination.

It is precisely for these reasons that the chief priest of Utoken is regarded as "the foremost and greatest of the religious functionaries in the village".<sup>36</sup> Major decisions concerning the community are enacted at the ugula of Utoken in such a way that they are "irrevocably binding on all concerned within the community".<sup>37</sup> As a result, what is regarded as, oloko Utoken, 'the laws of the land', are more effectively observed by the people in the community, than the secular laws.

The force of oloko Utoken is so strong at Ogu in particular and also in several other villages that the presence and influence of the Christian church is hardly felt. Indeed the influence of the Anglican church has declined in most places. At the time of this investigation at Ogu on 23rd October, 1985, it was such that only two nominal members



**PLATE 50** - Photograph showing the church warden of the Anglican Church at Ogu, who is among the few surviving, nominal members of the Anglican Church in the village. Both husband and wife are constantly sick and harrassed by circumstances beyond their control, so they may abandon their faith.

were left (see Plate 50). They have been so punished and impoverished by circumstances that no-one knows how much longer they too could endure. This is partly because the sense of dedication and seal portrayed by adherents of Utoken and other minor deities in the area are much more higher, and also more attractive and relevant to their present needs than anything else. Thus, to refuse to obey oloko Utoken, 'the laws of the land', in the absence of a better alternative, is tantamount to jeopardizing one's chances of life, joy and peaceful co-existence with the rest of the community.

#### Deities, Omens and Divination

An important aspect related to the cosmology, divination and deities in Epie-Atissa is that in connection with 'signs', isini-kanna. While this is relatively common, one place where signs have direct relevance to divination is in the shrine of Aruku-eken at Famgbe. This is because, according to Harvest Izonfatei the chief priest, this deity reveals itself to its devotees through a variety of signs.

For example, whenever the cock crows inside the house, it is generally known in Famgbe that Aruku-eken is demanding some drinks. When a white worm suddenly appears from nowhere, rolling and coiling around on the dry floor in someone's home, then Aruku-eken wants some food. The sight of a chameleon constitutes a sign from Aruku-eken that something

awful is about to happen, but could be averted. In any of these instances, only by means of ugbolo divination could the details be revealed.

Recounting some of his own personal experiences, the chief priest gave two specific examples. Soon after he had been made chief priest of Aruku-eken in 1974, a photograph hanging on the wall in his house fell down suddenly before him. He held it up, then realized it must be a sign. It was revealed, upon enquiry by divination that the flag of Aruku-eken had fallen down, and needed to be properly placed. This was immediately cross-checked, and to the amazement of all, it was discovered that the flag had actually been blown down by a strong wind.

The second sign from Aruku-eken occurred in 1981, in connection with a taboo contravened by one of his wives, for which she had to pay a fine of a cock and some drinks. But the cock she had bought for the purpose wandered off, and his wife angrily cursed the chicken to be mad, and it actually became mad. Later the chicken was killed, but while the neck was being cut-off, it was a great surprise that the dead chicken began to crow. The chief was so surprised that he called a soldier living nearby to help. An enquiry later revealed that his wife had cursed the chicken, so nobody in his family was to eat it. Thus Aruku-eken warns his devotees through specific signs or omens, isini-kanna (see at Chapter 4, pp.251f). As a result, people in Famgbe watch for them very carefully.

## CHAPTER 5

### FOOTNOTES

1. See Meyer Fortes, Oedipus and Job in West African Religion (1959), p.7; also W.R. Bascom, 'Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba', American Anthropologist, 53, 4, (1951), p.83; E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief (Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1962), pp. 171-172, and his, Ifa, An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus, op. cit., pp.113-114.
2. cf. E. Bolaji Idowu, Ifa, An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus, p.113.
3. Idem.
4. Gary Edwards and John Mason, Black Gods, Orisa Studies in the New World (Brooklyn, New York: Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1985), p.42; also P.A. Talbot, Tribes in the Niger Delta (London: The Sheldon Press, 1930), p.19, G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.24.
5. cf. Gary Edwards and John Mason, op. cit., p.42.
6. Emefie Ikenga Metuh, God and Man in African Religion (London: Geoffrey Chapman: 1981), pp.8-9.
7. According to John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, op. cit., p.53, the Zulu think the star, as the wife of the moon, thus portraying a corresponding idea of celestial marriage indicated in Epie-Atissa.
8. For further details, see Edmund Ilogu, Christianity and Ibo Culture (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p.102; also see J.A. Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim, The History of An African Independent Church, op. cit., pp.6-8, in which it is indicated that the founding and naming of this church are linked with the founder's experiences in the celestial city.
9. cf. Robin Horton, The Gods As Guests, (Lagos: Federal Government Printer, 1960), p.15. Here the Kalabari concept corresponds with those of Epie-Atissa.
10. Victor C. Uchendu, The Igbo of South East Nigeria (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp.12-13, expresses identical views.

11. For the basic difference between 'land' and 'water' deities, especially among the Kalabari people, see Robin Horton, The Gods As Guests, op. cit., pp.17-18.
12. cf. P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, op. cit., p.258.
13. Chieka Ifemesia, Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1979), pp.257-267 has given similar concepts in the Ibo area. According to Victor C. Uchendu, op. cit., pp.17-18, life is better preserved especially if the person concerned has been able to live a transparent life. The transparency of life is therefore a necessary qualification for leadership in Igbo, as well as in Epie-Atissa, because of the general belief that 'a good name is better than silver and gold'.
14. In addition to the attempt made on pp. 254<sup>f</sup>, in connection with 'Epie Atissa concept of Malevolent Forces', also see Prof. J.R. Gray's unpublished paper on: 'Christianity and Concepts of Evil in Sub-Saharan Africa', (1987), especially pp.8ff, in which some of the "many-faceted" aspects of evil are discussed.
15. cf. Gary Edwards and John Mason, op. cit. p.16; also see E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., pp.110-111, on the use of the 'dog', abua for sacrifice for Ogun, during which the "shrine is smeared and rubbed with the blood" (p.111). According to Francis A. Arinze, Sacrifice In Ibo Religion (Ibadan: 1970), p.93, so important is the blood that it is even "sprinkled on the worshippers". Others with similar views include, A. Leonard, The Lower Niger and Its Tribes (London: 1906), pp.454-455; P.A. Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, 3 (London: 1986), p.867.
16. See E.O. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., p.111.
17. cf. P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, op. cit., p.91.
18. Ibid., p.30.
19. See at Chapter 2, pp.112 and 130 in particular where the importance of 'plantain', abanna in Epie-Atissa as one of the main staple foods, was mentioned.
20. cf. Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religion', Journal of Religion in Africa, 4 (1971/72), p.171; also see Marion Kilson, 'Libation in Ga Ritual', JRA, 2 (1969), pp.11ff.
21. Chieka Ifemesia, Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo, An Historical Perspective, op. cit., p.34.
22. Idem.
23. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., p.160.



24. Idem.
25. Idem.
26. See at Chapter 4, pp. 236-237, in connection with the establishment of palm produce factory at Yenagoa, the capital of Epie-Atissa, an aspect which emphasizes the importance of palm-nuts to people in this community.
27. E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba (London: 1982), p.33.
28. Idem.
29. Idem.
30. E.M. McClelland, Ibid., p.32.
31. Idem.
32. P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, op. cit., p.270.
33. Idem.
34. See M. Gluckman, Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society (Oxford: 1971), pp.229-235; Victor Turner, Ndembu Divination, Its Symbolism and Techniques (1961), pp.235ff, for further details on the Cathartic function of divination.
35. cf. E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande, op. cit., pp. 258-270, for details.
36. Chieka Ifemesia, op. cit., p.34.
37. Idem.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE RITUAL CALLING OF DIVINERS AND

#### THEIR CULTIC PERSONNEL

##### Diviners - Priests:

It has been discovered during this fieldwork that all the diviners discussed here were first called to be priests and priestesses of their various deities, idiomu. This is embodied in the word onyo-obu, literally meaning a 'man who cures' hence 'native-doctors' in reference to their roles as priests, diviners, and herbalists. But all who were interviewed said they initially resisted the call, but finally accepted because they were no longer able to bear the misfortunes they underwent. There were various experiences but generally, the initial indication of this call is that the person concerned gets afflicted by various illnesses for which medical science may not be able to find any apparent reason or cure. But such sicknesses tend to vanish away after the person has acquiesced to serve the particular idiomu, 'divinity'. Furthermore, most of the people who have become mediums of one deity or the other in Epie-Atissa are mostly women who had experienced one form of calamity or the other, especially while they were young. Those calamities, locally called ababaa caused them to go from place to place looking for answers. Wherever they went, they were told by the 'diviners', onyobu, that they were haunted by divinities, and were warned that things may

never get better until they had acquiesced. Their healing depended on their obedience to serve deity. This may therefore, probably explain why de Heusch has expressed the view that it is therapeutic to become a mediumistic diviner,<sup>1</sup> and also the view expressed by Devisch "that many diviners begin their career during mental illness".<sup>2</sup> It is therefore necessary that these theories and other related aspects be examined, in the light of what obtains in Epie-Atissa. In order to ascertain whether what has been said is not limited to women only, it will therefore be necessary to consider the opinions of the men in addition to the women.

### The Male Diviners - Priests

#### 1. Simeon Tinbiri:

The first person interviewed in connection with the ritual calling was Simeon Tinbiri, 'Chief Priest', ebeni-idiomu of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba, who has been priest since 1965. He confirmed that he did not accept it readily, but refused on the basis that he was too young at that time to accept the post in order to replace the previous priest who died in 1964. As a result, he fell ill from 1964 through most of 1965. He could do nothing during this period, and he also lost four of his children. He almost died too.

According to him, "seeing that condition of things was becoming unbearable, and also not willing to die at the



**PLATE 51** - Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba, in his cultic attire. He was appointed priest of Aruku-egene since 1965.

tender age of 28, I decided to accept the position". He concluded by saying that, "since I accepted the post I recovered from the illness, and my family has also not experienced any further deaths". Following his acceptance, a day was then appointed for his initiation, on which every member of the community, was prohibited from doing any servile work. He was taken to the forest, to the shrine of Aruku-egene, and after the necessary rituals of offerings, sacrifices and libations, he was attired in full regalia, a special white uniform comprising a white bedspread tied from his waist down, a white shirt and hat. A white feather of an eagle was pinned on to the hat, then he was given a 'staff of office of Aruku-egene', locally called ugbolo Aruku-egene, as a sign of his authority. Soon after this, he was possessed by the spirit of Aruku-egene and began to prophesy, especially about how the ceremony should be performed. All women were instructed to remain indoors. They were not supposed to see the Chief Priest of Aruku-egene in his full regalia, as he came into the village with his entourage. (See Plate 51 showing the Chief Priest in his full regalia).

In the midst of drumming and singing, Simeon and the devotees of Aruku-egene, all male, danced round the village 4 times, from one end of the village to the other. After the fourth time, he was then taken to his residence where he finally took off his cultic regalia and changed to his normal clothes. It was after this that all the women were allowed to come out of their hiding places. Then led by

the male worshippers, all persons in the village now joined, both male and female, young and old, and danced 4 more times from one end of the village to the other, thus making a total number of 8 times. Therefore the whole day became a day of festivity and jubilation throughout the village of Akaba.

After this initiation ceremony in 1965, Simeon received his tutorials from Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, who is regarded as ebeneken idiomu, 'the director of traditional and customary affairs'. He was also taught by the idiomu itself.

Non-initiates are prohibited from entering the shrine of Aruku-egene. The qualifications for initiation are that, the candidate must be male, a native of Akaba, and must not be below the age of 20. Candidates as a rule may present a bottle of kaikai before the shrine, as a kind of formal application. Once the drink has been accepted, and the appropriate libations made, the balance is shared among the devotees. Nothing is taken home. It is after this initial move that a day is fixed for the proper initiation ceremony. But the details can neither be revealed to non-initiates nor could they be allowed to see the shrine of Aruku-egene.

## 2. Orderly Torotein:

The personal data of Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken at Akaba, has already been given (see above, Chapter 1 pp.45-46).

Narrating how Orderly Torotein was selected, Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha confirmed during the interview on 7th February, 1986, that the selection and appointment of anyone to the priests of either Aruku-egene or Utoken, always takes the form of divination by means of ugbolo, 'staff'. Thus following the death of Gbunadomu in 1966, a day was set aside as usual for the purpose of seeking divine selection for his successor. While all the adults assembled at the appointed time at the shrine of Utoken, Orderly Torotein failed to appear. He was away resting in his house. But in the course of the gbolo divination, the ugbolo departed from the presence of all and went directly to the residence of Orderly Torotein, thus divinely appointing him as Chief Priest of Utoken. Initially, he refused to accept the position. But remembering what happened to his friend, Simeon Tinbiri, he knew he would be inviting to himself much trouble if he refused. He therefore accepted, inevitably.

### 3. Harvest Izonfatei:

The 'chief priest', ebeni-idiomu of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, was appointed to the post in 1974, while still a member of the Catholic Church. He was born in 1942, and grew up to know that Aruku-eken was the premier deity in the village to which all owed allegiance. He was baptized in 1959, and being groomed ready to go to the Catholic Seminary. But just then, his father intervened because he was the only child of his mother. His father attached great importance to him and did not permit his son to take the vows of



**PLATE 52** - Harvest Izonfatei,  
chief priest of Aruku-eken at  
Famgbe, with his mother.



**PLATE 53** - Harvest Izonfatei,  
chief priest of Aruku-eken at  
Famgbe, with his 3 wives. He  
became priest in March, 1974.



celibacy whereby he would never marry and produce children. (See Plate 52, in which Harvest Izonfatei poses with his mother in the sitting room of his residence; and in Plate 53, with his first of 3 wives. Also see Plate 45, and p.285 for additional information).

But he fell seriously ill early in January 1973, during which he lost all appetite for food. At first they thought he had malaria, but the situation worsened daily and became incurable. As a result, the diviners were consulted in order to ascertain the cause of his illness. He went to Aruku-eken's ugula, 'shrine' and there it was revealed that Harvest Izonfatei was supposed to be the next ebene-idiomu, 'Chief Priest', of Aruku-eken. "He has been appointed to work and to save the town. That is why I have arrested him", was the reply from Aruku-eken. When this was communicated to him, he refused because he believed in Christianity. He therefore thought they had made a mistake.

As his illness worsened, he was taken to other 'native doctors', onyo-obu, who after divining, told him the same thing, and advised that he should accept to serve the idiomu, 'deity', if he wanted to live long. He started recovering as he decided to worship the 'deity' in order to avoid worse calamities, such as the death of his children, or his wife, brother, sister, etc. He thought it would be most unfortunate to allow such to happen before obeying. He gained his full recovery on 20 November, 1973, after being seriously ill for 6 months. He therefore took his



**PLATE 54** - Harvest Izonfatei,  
chief priest of Aruku-egene at  
Famgbe, with his three most  
important devotees and teachers:  
Frank Manpassman, Surere Uku, and  
Josiah Oniesika.

chair as priest of Aruku-eken in March 1974. He now has 8 children, and has not been sick since then.

#### Initiation Ceremony:

Narrating how he was initiated as 'chief priest', ebene-idiomu of Aruku-eken, Harvest Izonfatei said, on the appointed day, he was asked to buy a number of things, such as: a cock, a bunch of plantain, two bottles of 'strong drink', kaikai, and some quantities of salt and pepper. On arrival at the ugula, he was told by the devotees led by three persons: namely, Frank Manpassman, about 65 years old, and the most experienced devotee of Aruku-eken, Surere Uku, priest of Utoken, and Josiah Oniesika, priest of benikuruku, his family deity, to sit down, holding the cock in his right hand. These three persons also became his teachers after his initiation. (See Plate 54 in which the chief priest is flanked by the three persons mentioned, in that order).

The cock was then placed on the bunch of plantain, then he held a bottle of kaikai with his left hand, and repeated the following:

Aruku-eken, you called me to worship you. I have taken my seat today in order to worship you. With this cock, I give you my undertaking that I shall worship you. Now that I have agreed to worship you, I leave everything concerning my life into your hands. I leave into your hands the safety of my wife, my children, my relations, my own safety and long life, and that of the whole town. I shall worship you from this day till my old age. Therefore have this chicken and into your hands I commend my safety.

Having said this, all the worshippers responded in unison, saying: "Yes, this cock belongs to Aruku-eken".

Following this, he was then given his priestly attire, which comprises, a white bed-sheet tied from his waist down, but bare-bodied; with a white hat on his head, on which is pinned a white feather of an eagle. The white feather of an eagle would indicate that the eagle was an old one, because when they are old, the feathers become white. Associated with this is a ceremony held for Aruku-eken at Famgbe once a year, during the dry season, in recognition of the successful way Aruku-eken had protected and supplied the needs of the entire town for the whole year. During this ceremony, he appears in public in the way described, and he holds a big white 'fan', azuzu, in his right hand (see Plate 24). Then under the overwhelming influence of the idionu, the chief priest accompanied with his devotees and with drumming and singing, would walk through the length and breadth of the town. He walks first to the West, then to the East; that is against the tide and then with the tide. This is because Famgbe is situated along the bank of the river, with water flowing from the West to the East. Thus going from the East to the West signifies the gathering together of all the evil forces responsible for people's death, retardation of progress, and otherwise, and as he goes with the tide toward the East all these forces are flushed away with the tide.

Noteworthy are certain similarities and dissimilarities in the way the various chief priests were attired during their initiation ceremonies. For example, Andusugurugha Abadiofoni, priest of Utoken at Ogu, and Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene at Akaba, all had their bodies covered with white materials during their initiations, and no part was left uncovered (see Plate 46 and Plate 51, respectively). But Harvest Izonfatei covered his body only from the waist down. The rest of him was not covered. This could be explained on the basis that Aruku-eken is a war-like deity, and the chief priest must portray this fact by being bare-bodied, which implies readiness for war in a climate that is always warm and humid. By contrast, however, the priest of Utoken at Ogu was given a 'fan', azuzu made of solid leather, a 'walking stick', ugbolo, red cap and a mantle (again, see at Plate 47). Simeon Tinbiri at Akaba was also given ugbolo, as 'staff of office', but was not given any fan or mantle. Harvest Izonfatei at Famgbe was given a special fan, made of white horse leather, the white wool serving as decoration, but no ugbolo and 'mantle', ubo-akani. Here, ubo means 'hand', and akani means 'cloth'. Thus ubo-akani means, literally, 'hand of cloth', which was usually carried on the shoulder by the elderly men several years ago in Epie-Atissa as a sign of old age. It served as a handkerchief with which they cleaned their hands after drinking or snuffing. Finally, both Simeon Tinbiri and Harvest Izonfatei wore white hats, but the priest of Utoken at Ogu wore a red cap. These

differences also highlight the fact that they were serving different deities, which also dictated what their chief priests should wear.

Taboos of Office:

One of the most important taboos of office for Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken is that he must not shake hands with people for the rest of his life. He may however receive his guests by embracing them, if necessary, and nothing more. This is a law which all chief priests of Aruku-eken must observe because shaking hands with people is tantamount to the transfer of power from him to others.

Explaining why this is the case, the chief priest indicated that all power given to him by Aruku-eken are in his hands, especially the right hand. He thinks when the onyo-obu, 'native-doctor' prepares charms and evil medicines for his clients, emphasis is usually placed on the proper use of the right hand in the handling of these things. In his case, however, the prohibition covers both the right and left hands. He also knows of others beside himself who would not shake hands, especially with strange people because of fear. This is because he had personally seen somebody whose genitals disappeared from him soon after shaking hands with a strange person at Onitsha, in Anambra State of Nigeria some years ago. While he does not think this could happen to him, he does not shake hands because it is a major taboo of his office as chief priest of Aruku-eken.

While this particular taboo may seem strange to be occurring in Epie-Atissa where people are generally very warm and friendly, it may correspond with the hand cult practised in Benin area, especially among the Urhobo and Isoko, who worshipped the personal powers of the hand. It is a cult which ensures success in work and prevents the farmer from experiencing machet accidents. Hence according to Bradbury, members of this cult recognized the arm as "the seat of power of accomplishing things. Its worship is particularly characteristic of warriors, but is also practised by other wealthy and high-ranking people",<sup>3</sup> who erect special altars for the 'hand', ubo. This however contrasts with the head cult, also practised in Benin area in which "the Oba and other people of high rank have altars dedicated to their heads",<sup>4</sup> utomu. This is because the 'head', utomu is recognized as the most important part of the human being, which determines his destiny. Thus, when the Oba of Benin celebrated his head cult several years ago, "formerly this was an occasion of human sacrifices but today cows, goats, and other animals are used".<sup>5</sup> Thus, as members of the hand cult are forbidden from shaking hands, similarly, no-one touches the heads of those in the head cult. In some communities in the Niger Delta, some people may not want their head to be touched not because they are members of any head cult; rather, they are afraid that their hair may be removed in the process and used in witchcraft. "Similar superstitions are attached to the use of spittle, nail-parings and old garments, by which it is thought that misfortune may be brought upon the person from

whom these were obtained."<sup>6</sup> It is therefore possible that the hand-shaking taboo at Famgbe being discussed may have its origin from Benin.

The second major taboo relates to the abusive language commonly used especially by parents against their naughty and troublesome children, known as di-akpa, meaning 'eat faeces'. He was not to say this to anyone because it may take effect. And he was not to hear anyone say it either. If he heard it said to somebody especially while eating or drinking, he was required to stop immediately and throw away all what was left. It was a wicked and disrespectful language from which the chief priest of Aruku-eken must disassociate himself. Apart from these two major taboos, others include laws about the proper up-keep of the shrine of Aruku-eken, and other moral issues which have already been mentioned in a number of places.

#### 4. Prophet Orioko Dangolo:

Another person whose calling is worth mentioning is Prophet Orioko Dangolo, the leader of Epie-Bottle Divination. Some important facts about him have already been expressed (see above, Chapter 3, pp.214-219). He was interviewed on 23rd March, 1985, in which he indicated that he began work in 1976, because of an accident he had some years ago.

Explaining how this happened, he said he had gone with somebody to cut timber in the forest. Before going, he recalled how he overheard his companion making several



unusual incantations while he sharpened their axes. Then while cutting the timber, he thought his companion deliberately cut him on his left leg, giving him a deep wound which incapacitated him. It was with very great difficulty that they managed to bring him home. Foul play was suspected so he was taken to a certain village in Engenni area and was introduced to the art of bottle divination through which all those involved in the plot against his life were revealed, including all their plans and intentions. Thereafter, the appropriate treatment was applied and he recovered rather marvellously.

He thus became convinced that it would be beneficial to the people in Epie-Atissa for him to establish the Epie-Bottle Divination. The purpose was to create the awareness of the importance of bottle divination. He was convinced that it was a means by which those who were suffering from poverty, disease and constant children mortality, and other related problems, could discover the sources of their calamities, and also the solutions. He was particularly interested in helping to expose the deceptive practices of 'the witches', igbani-ida in the area, thereby rendering a useful service to the people. It was thus established in 1976.

### The Cultic Personnel

The private and the individual mediums in Epie-Atissa prefer to treat all that goes on in their shrines as confidentially

as possible. But this is not the case with all communal shrines. The idea of cultic personnel will therefore be restricted to this last category only.

In this regard, five categories of cultic personnel may be discerned, namely: the priest, the elders, the secretary, the cooks and finally, the drummers and singers. All these must work together in harmony under the leadership of the priest in such a way that nothing is done without divine sanction. And whenever in doubt, the elders who also make up the communal divining team are quickly summoned in order to seek divine opinion and direction, and thus bring about consensus.

#### 1. The Priest

As already mentioned in several places, the priest is divinely appointed, and thus performs the function of general overseer; hence the more befitting title of 'Chief Priest'. In that capacity, he serves the entire community, but without any real income. (See above, Chapter 5, pp.307-308).

The only difference could be that in highly patronized centres of divination like that of Orisa at Akaba, where much income is realized, they are more likely to be more generous with their chief priest. But the extent to which this is done is not clear because it is not defined.

The situation is different in <sup>the</sup> Kalabari area. There, the

priest has a number of privileges. First, as priest to the communal deity, he also becomes the property of the entire community. Thus the community is responsible ~~for~~ <sup>ing</sup> taking care of him and supporting him. They are to pay for the cost of his marriage to any women of his choice in the community. But the problem here is that when he dies, his personal properties belong to the community. The children born by him before he became chief priest belong to his family; but those born after he became "priest go back with their mothers to their own families, as town money was used"<sup>7</sup> in paying for the dowry. Traders are generous to their chief priests as a sign of appreciation for his selfless services to the community.

In the Yoruba area, the services of the babalawo are so regarded that "some important kings retain groups of Ifa priests as privileged advisers with special responsibilities".<sup>8</sup> It has been reliably reported that "the Oni of Ife has sixteen such priests of his own attached to his court",<sup>9</sup> and the Alaafin of Oyo also has many as part of his court. The Oba of Benin also has a number of special priests as members of his retinue, who perform the functions of royal ancestor priests, called Ihogbe. These are "allowed to stand on the dais where the Oba and his wives and children sit during state ceremonies".<sup>10</sup> Thus in places where there are long established kingdoms, the kings utilize their services, and therefore make adequate provisions for their welfare. But in places where that is not the case, including the Ibo area, the communal priests seem to rely a

great deal on the goodwill of the worshippers,<sup>11</sup> or upon the lineage.<sup>12</sup>

But generally, the priests perform identical functions. For example, the priest of Utoken has it as his duty to interpret the laws and customs of the people. He deals with all matters relating to the ancestors therefore Arinze calls him, "the vicar of the ancestors".<sup>13</sup> The priest takes care of cultic festivals, performs divination, offers sacrifices and says relevant prayers for the good of the community. Thus, he sets and upholds the moral tone of the community by keeping and ensuring that all necessary taboos are maintained and observed. Since this could be an awesome task, he would therefore need the co-operation of all the other members of the cultic personnel to keep everything in balance. It is to him that individuals go with requests for their special needs; and women who desire for children seek for aid.

## 2. The Elders:

The elders are generally called in Epie-Atissa, Igbani-egene, meaning 'the big people' whose views are to be respected. Therefore they seem to constitute the members of the cultic panel who help to train up the new priest. For example, Chief Donkimi Kimiokrogha, the ebene-eken idiomu, 'traditional ruler' at Akaba performed this role in the training of Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene, and Orderly Torotein, priest of Utoken at Akaba. His views were regarded as authoritative in all matters connected with the

worship and veneration of deities, and all related activities, such as divination, sacrifices, festivals etc. Similarly, at Famgbe, Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken, is also surrounded by a number of 'elders', igbani-egene, who ensure that he does not falter. Even then, the oracles are always consulted for divine direction, so in the end, divinity is the main 'teacher'.

It has already been seen that in the case of the female priests, the women-elders are called inaa, who are highly skilled in matters regarding idiomu in general. Thus at Ogu, Mrs. Miederi-Abadiofini, priestess of Lokobide, and Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi, priestess of Orueperemo, perform the roles of teaching, directing and disciplining other female mediums.

### 3. The Secretary:

This cultic post is known nowhere else in Epie-Atissa except at Orisa shrine, at Akaba. The peculiar problems which led to the appointment of Japan Any<sup>a</sup><sub>K</sub>sara as Secretary in the shrine of Orisa have already been indicated (see above, Chapter 4. pp.226-227). As the work at Orisa shrine began to flourish, it soon became necessary that someone had to be appointed to keep the records. But no-one in the secular world could be given that assignment; he had to be somewhat familiar with the ways of idiomu. As a result, Japan Any<sup>a</sup><sub>K</sub>sara also has his personal divinity.

Explaining how this came about, he said he was also

possessed by a personal deity from the water, idiomu-amini, or 'mammy-water' in 1982, to whom he is married. He sleeps alone on every ede-wiyedeke, 'the heathens' Sabbath day', because the idiomu comes to sleep with him then as his wife, and sometimes takes him on a subterranean journey through the depths of the sea. He said he resisted at first, but after all his children died, and his two wives were suffering, he finally gave in. Now all his wives have their shrines and he too has his. For his initiation, a woman took him to a sandbank, with sacrificial items like biscuits, raw rice, tin of corned beef, 'bitter cola', wala wala, some sugar and a chicken. All except the chicken were placed in a dish; then at mid-stream, on their way to the sandbank, the contents were thrown into the water as offering to the deity, together with a bottle of soft drink. In the process, he called the deity by name, saying, "This is your offering. I am your husband bringing this offering. All I want from you are long life, wealth and children. I therefore want your protection and let my children have long life as well."

Then at the sand bank, the woman took him into the water, dipped his head in it as if in baptism. Then as he came out of it, she hit him on the head with the fowl, and from that moment on, he became unconscious till the following day when he found that his body was full of mud and sand. People then told him that he was possessed by the deity, and he sang and danced and prophesied, but without being aware of what he did. The initiation ceremony lasted for 7 days,

during which 6 days were covered with singing and dancing. But on the 7th day, he was received by all the worshippers of various deities in the village, and publicly recognized and acclaimed as another member of the 'deities cult'. People came from everywhere to that ceremony, and many gave him presents. As a major taboo, he does not eat snail and mackerel fish especially because the fish resembles Odum, 'python'.

#### 4. The Drummers and Singers:

As was explained by Japan Anyasara, secretary at the shrine of Orisa at Akaba, the 7th day is a day of recognition for the initiate by the entire public. It is regarded as the climax, which is marked by 'drumming', eze, 'singing', ivin, and 'dancing', ada. It is also accompanied by the ringing of 'bells', igbeme, especially in Kalabari area.<sup>14</sup>

In Epie-Atissa however, that is the day that very specific music is made to the praise of idiomu with drums accompanied with apata, which are musical instruments from the 'pitcher', aki, which cause the initiate to manifest possession by idiomu. This was experienced by Miederi Abadiofoni (see p.359; so also Janet Adibagha (pp.363-364), and Preye Jakan (p.370). One reason is because lots of sacrifices are offered during this period which necessitate drumming, singing and dancing, following each sacrifice.

#### 5. The Cooks:

The 'cooks', igbani-dele-idiomu, literally meaning, 'those





**PLATE 60** - Picture shows parts of Orisa shrine littered with animal bones, some of which are very close to the feet of Chief Kimiokrogba, ebeneken-idiomu, 'the custodian of traditional matters', at Akaba.

**PLATE 61** - The cultic cook ready to cook his usual cultic meal in the shrine of Aruku-eken, at Famgbe, in his cultic kitchen.

**PLATE 62** - The cultic cook is busy cooking in the cultic kitchen at the shrine of Aruku-eken at Famgbe. He is informed to hurry up as devotees in the shrine were hungry and ready to eat.

who cook food', are specifically attached to the communal shrines, where some of the clientele make some of their payments with animals. For example, a number of people who visited the Orisa shrine at Akaba from February 9, 1983 - February 7, 1986, promised to give sheep in addition to other things, if their needs were met. Accordingly, therefore, when they brought their animals, they were either sold and the proceeds brought to the coffers, or the animal killed, slaughtered and prepared as meat for all the worshippers to partake in a communal meal. It is during such occasions that the best parts are given to the chief priests (see above, Chapter 5, pp.307-308).

Thus in Plate 60, it could be seen that parts of Orisa shrine is littered with animal bones, some of which are very close to the feet of Chief Kimiokrogha, the ebene-eken-idiomu, 'the custodian of traditional matters'. The situation is ~~rather~~ better organised in the shrine of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, where a kitchen is properly attached. Thus, in Plate 61, it can be seen that the cook has just finished washing up the pot ready to cook one of such meals. And in Plate 62, he was still busy cooking, but it had taken such a long time for him to announce that the food was ready. Therefore hungry and apparently impatient, one of the worshippers was sent from the shrine by the chief priest to hurry him up. Thus, while the cook is holding the pot cover and the cooking spoon in his hands, his other kitchen utensils include, three small 'mortars', agba, lying close by, and a large one hanging near the hearth, probably in

order to dry it. The communal meals are put into that large mortar and all the cultic members eat from it. The chief priest's share is put into one of the smaller ones. He is the only one who may eat alone.

It could also be seen that firewood is the only source of heating in this shrine and also in all other shrines. No gas cooker or anything of that sort is allowed. Similarly, no type of cutlery, such as forks, knives and spoons are used when eating. All use their bare hands. It has already been indicated that such things are prohibited from the shrine, so everybody is required to be bare bodied (see above, Chapter 2, p.168). Other cultic personnel would include 'the bottler', onyo-so-idi, that is, 'one who serves the drinks', in accordance with the given pattern (see Plate 30, Chapter 2, p.176); and the 'drinks-seller', onyo-de-idi, who climbs up to the cellar in the shrine in order to supply drinks of kaikai to buyers (see Plate 41, Chapter 4, p.274).

### Analysis

A number of points can be deduced from the foregoing regarding the ritual calling of diviners.

First, all the priests seemed to have responded to their call after having experienced bitter calamities; but they all recovered after having decided to serve their various

deities. The purpose of inflicting calamities upon them initially, therefore ~~was~~ to gain complete and total submission of their will by the deities they were to serve. Only then can they be used as mediums. This is probably why the view has been expressed by Zempleni, Bohannan, Jackson and Retel-Laurentin, that mediumistic divination is something that affects the soul and mind.<sup>15</sup> This is because, as agent of spirit or demi-god, the diviner, once possessed no longer has any will of his own. After the initial period of mental stress, he then receives therapy once every resistance has been broken. After this, they became very zealous and ~~see~~ themselves as people with a sense of mission, and therefore privileged and important.

What obtains in Epie-Atissa in connection with the selection and call of priests is in certain ways different from what obtains in some other parts of the Niger Delta, especially in Kalabari. ~~There~~, one major qualification for the call is that the person must "be very light in colour",<sup>16</sup> which is regarded as an indication that person was "the man of the spirit land".<sup>17</sup> The fact is that owing to the early contact the Kalabari people had with European traders in the 18th and 19th Centuries, some of these Europeans mixed freely with the women, thus producing a generation of people with light colour in this area. This was not the case in Epie-Atissa; as a result most people are dark in colour. Hence if the condition of being light in colour were imposed in Epie-Atissa, then all the persons mentioned here would have been disqualified because they are all dark skinned.

Perhaps for similar reasons as those of the Kalabari people in Benin gave special attention to albinos, and they played important functions in the worship of some of their cults. The most notable centre for this was a place called Uareke to which albinos from neighbouring communities were sent.<sup>18</sup> Again in Epie-Atissa, there are scarcely any albinos. Apart from these aspects, generally, all the persons chosen to be priest of any communal deity must be in every respect, of a pure parentage of that community. Finally, certain divinities in Kalabari area would prefer that the chief priest remained either celibate or husband of only one wife.<sup>19</sup> These conditions do not apply in Epie-Atissa because Harvest Izonfatei was stopped from becoming a Roman Catholic Priest in order to stop him from being a celibate (see at p.335-337). It has already been indicated that as chief priest of Aruku-eken at Fangbe, he has three wives and eight children. All the other priests are similarly polygamists.

The relationship between these priests, diviners and the members of the cultic personnel is usually always very cordial. They all work together harmoniously, in order to carry out the desired purpose of the particular 'deity', idiomu. But as the general overseer, it is the priest who gives the orders and ensures that they are carried out, and it is he who is held answerable to the idiomu for all the lapses. Hence before anything is done, the priest ensures that divine approval has been obtained through divination.

Thus society tends to look up to them for mutual direction through which they exert their influence.

### **Female Diviners and Their Ritual Calling**

All the female diviners, as will be seen, are ritually called to become priestesses or mediums of their own personal deities first, before also becoming diviners. A place where such examples abound is Ogu.

Thus, on 14th September, 1985, ten of these women who make up the 'deities cult', locally called, Igbani-kene-idiomu, literally meaning, 'those who worship divinities', assembled in the premises of Chief Marla Abasi, the ebene-eken. They ranged from the ages of about 30-70 years old, the oldest among them being Mrs. Miederi Abadiofoni, who is also regarded as their 'mother'. She was therefore interviewed first.

#### **1. Mrs. Miederi Abadiofoni, Priestess of Lokobide:**

She said she attended the elementary school as a child, and became a member of the Anglican Church. But while still in the elementary school, she began to experience strange things. First, she went fishing with her elder sister one day, and while fishing for crayfish, she heard a strange noise coming towards them in the water. She was surprised that her sister did not hear the noise. As they continued fishing in the water, with the cloth used for this kind of

fishing,<sup>20</sup> the noise grew louder and louder until she was able to recognize that they were a type of money called ada-igbogi, or 'manilla'.<sup>21</sup> They came in a single line, and as they entered into the cloth, the water level around them began to rise immediately. She found that she was about to drown in the process, and only the quick arrival of their mother saved her. But they took the cloth with them.

Her second experience after that was that each time she heard people beating drums, she began to experience some funny feelings and thought she was being possessed by a force beyond her control. Then when she got married, she experienced miscarriages at the end of every five months. She also experienced constant sicknesses that further complicated the matter. As a result, they finally went somewhere and consulted with the diviner who told her that an evil, barren idiomu which hated children called Kula, was after her. She was then warned that unless Kula, the evil idiomu was done away with, she would never have children, and also be healthy. They finally got rid of Kula and replaced it with Olokobide, son of Ekine, another important idiomu. Following this, she gave birth to a son called Godfrey, now a retired school master. She has now served Olokobide for about 35 years.

She has since had 4 children, and she prospers in her farming; all the children have been blessed with long life and good health. The medium of communication between her and Olokobide is in Nembe, Brass dialect. This may suggest



**PLATE 55** - Mrs. Miederi  
 Abadiofoni, priestess of Lokobide  
 and wife of Andusugurugha  
 Abadiofoni, chief priest of  
Utoken at Ogu, in her ugula,  
 'shrine', with her cultic 'fan',  
azuzu in her hand.



that her divinity comes from Brass. But before serving Olokobide, sacrifices consisting of rice, biscuits, alligator-pepper (Afromomum meleguata), drinks such as kaikai, and minerals were offered, during which she agreed to serve the deity for the rest of her life. She only received her peace and began to recover steadily after she had surrendered her will and submitted totally. (In Plate 55, Mrs. Miederi Abadiofoni, priestess of Lolobide in her ugula 'shrine', with a 'fan', azuzu in her hand).

## 2. Nimbaraye Abasi, Priestess of Orueperemo

Speaking about her ritual calling,, Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi said the idiomu called Orueperemo is a family idiomu which was worshipped by her grandfather called Keingede. He passed it on after his death to his daughter called Omoborugu, who is still alive. She gave birth to Nimbaraye Abasi, and now both mother and daughter are priestesses of the same idiomu.

As in the case of Miederi Abadiofoni, she too attended the Anglican church, the only church in the village. She led the women's wing during meetings and other associations, and was very determined to be a very strong Christian woman. But somehow, she fell very sick. Later she got married, became pregnant and gave birth successfully to a boy. This strengthened her faith to the extent that she threw away all the images that her mother had given her. After throwing away the gods on Saturday, her son died on Sunday without any sickness. She then remained for a long time without a

child. Every attempt to have another child failed, and she fell seriously sick for a period of about a year and four months.

At last her husband took her to a diviner at a village called Agbura, and there it was revealed that the idiomu called Orueperemo was angry with her for throwing away her images. It was further revealed that it was this divinity that killed her son, and she will also die if she failed to serve it. Even then she refused because she had decided to be a Christian; it was this refusal that prolonged her sufferings to a period of one year and four months. Seeing that things were becoming hopeless, her husband pleaded with her to accept to serve the idiomu, and that he would give her all the necessary support. The diviner at Agbura called Mary was then invited to supervise her initiation, and to bring the idiomu into their residence.

Soon after she had acquiesced ~~in serving~~ the idiomu, she began to experience strange things. For example, she was surprised to see a spoon 'swimming' towards her as she paddled in her canoe down the river to her farm. She said at first she thought something was hooked to her canoe, hence the strange noise she heard behind her. But on turning round, she actually saw a 'spoon', igasi, 'swimming' towards her. Gripped with fear, she quickly turned the canoe ashore so she could escape. But just then, the spoon jumped from the water into the front of the canoe. She therefore took the spoon and brought it home, and it is still kept in her

shrine to this day. Later, she also picked up ''manilla',  
ada-igbogi, which are also in her shrine.

As she relaxed and gradually made up her mind to serve  
Orueperemo, the idiomu appeared to her one night as a white  
man, and spoke to her in Epie dialect, saying:

I am the idiomu you earlier rejected. Now I have  
come to reveal myself to you. You said you wanted  
to serve God, and not me. Indeed you are free to  
serve God, but you must serve me too, and also help  
others to serve idiomu. Then you will be endowed  
with the power to invite other idiomu to take  
possession of other women like you. Therefore,  
through you, many will have idiomu in their homes;  
they will be blessed with children, money, wealth,  
and long life. This is the work you have; I have  
given them to you.

After hearing him say this to her in Epie dialect, she said  
she responded by saying:

Yes, I will serve you. I did not know anything  
earlier than this time. That was why I resisted.  
But now that you have appeared to me, and have  
spoken to me in my own Epie dialect, I doubt no  
more. I have agreed to serve you from henceforth.

Since this episode, she has got several disciples, and apart  
from Mrs. Miederi Abadiofoni who is the number one cultic  
'mother', called inaa, she is the next in rank. She trains  
her disciples to realize that gifts and sacrifices to idiomu  
are not given at random, but in accordance with divine  
direction by means of divination. For example, if idiomu  
makes demands for 7 bottles of soft drinks, nothing less

must be given. Otherwise it creates serious problems. In other words, they are given exactly what they want, without which there may not be any peace because the sacrifice is rejected.

3. **Mrs. Janet Adibagha, Priestess of Odumgbirigbiri:**

Janet Adibagha is the daughter of Andusugurugha Abadiofoni, chief priest of Utoken, and Miederi Abadiofoni, priestess of Lokobide. She was therefore influenced by her environment and background. She said she grew up experiencing strange things. For example, she would sometimes see a 'walking stick', ugbolo swimming towards her as she went swimming in the river. At other times she would come across colourful dishes and saucers in the water; sometimes they would be white bed sheets or basins. She would sometimes see white men sitting on a sand bank, but no-one else would see these things. She was thus frightened to go to the bush as well as to the river for fear of seeing strange things.

Then she got married to Mr. J.A. Adibagha, a school teacher who took her to church, and to several other places, but nothing changed. Instead, while travelling with her husband in a canoe along the river one day, a 'walking stick', ugbolo suddenly appeared from the water and jumped into the canoe. Her husband also saw this strange thing himself. Then following a pregnancy and childbirth, she continued to bleed almost to the point of death. Even then she refused to accept worshipping idionu. She preferred to die rather than submit to such wicked, evil powers. But while this

continued, her child died, and she too became sick to the point of death. As a result, her parents including her husband pleaded with her to accept to worship the idiomu and not die. From then on she began to experience moments of possession by the idiomu especially when drums were beaten. The beating of drums often caused the manifestation of the idiomu.

In order to save her from the suffering and death at the hands of the idiomu, her father invited Nimbaraye Abasi, the second cultic 'mother', inaa to set up the divinity for his daughter. The rites and related rituals lasted for a period of seven days with fanfare and beating of drums. But on the seventh day, she was taken to a particular sand bank for the final initiation and consummation of the marriage between her and the idiomu called Odumgbirigbiri, which is the name for a 'big python' she serves.<sup>22</sup> They went with some sacrifices comprising, biscuits, corned beef, bitter-cola, sugar and some bottles of kaikai. Nimbaraye Abasi took her to the water as if to be baptized. And as soon as she dipped her head into the water, she found herself suddenly transported to a big town inside the water, during which she underwent a series of encounters.

First, she was encountered by two men who came to her in a speed boat; one was white, and the other was black. They spoke to her in Kalabari and Nembe dialects, in which the black was introduced to her as Oru-egbeye, meaning 'that which is suitable for the deity'. The white was introduced

as Odumsana-dirigebo, or 'the secretary to Odum, 'the python', who takes note of what goes on in and around the sand bank. Then Oru-egbeye who spoke to her in Kalabari gave her water to drink seven times. Similarly, Odumsana-dirigebo spoke to her in Nembe, and gave her water to drink seven times as well. After this, another person called Ekine-gbugbu, son of the mighty deity called Ekine also gave her water to drink seven times.<sup>23</sup> Everything seemed real to her because she saw people like human beings in the water who went about their business with much activity.

Meanwhile, time was going fast and all those who came in the company of her parents and her husband to the sand bank for the initiation ceremony had waited for almost two hours, and were becoming uncomfortably frightened. None including her husband dared to risk diving into the water in search of her. Then she had her second encounter in which the three divinities already mentioned started to teach her the various things she was to do after they had returned her to the earth. They told her about the various methods she should apply in order to be able to communicate with various deities. She was also told how she was to assist others in the worship of these deities. In short, she was elevated to a leadership position and commissioned to lead and direct others in ways that will be helpful to mankind. For this, they gave her a 'walking stick', ugbolo and she was instructed to keep it always in her ugula, 'shrine'.



**PLATE 56** - Janet Adibagha,  
priestess of Odumgbirigbiri, and  
Kaigo Oyi, priestess of  
Ekine-gbugbu, from the right.

By this time people were tired of waiting for her, so another priestess by the name of Dere, who was familiar and experienced in the ways of the divinities and water spirits, jumped into the water in search of Janet Adibagha. Being aware of an intruder, her captors in the water released her and she soon surfaced with Dere. These things happened in 1978, and constitute the beginning of her ritual calling to serve idiomu, and the great work ahead. The deity has since been brought to their home, and a special partition or corner has been given to it. The 'walking stick' they gave her in the water occupies an important place in her ugula. She divines with it and it is used in searching out wherever evil people may have planted charms and other evil medicines. By the help of the idiomu, she is capable of receiving advance information about evil things that are about to happen in the community and how to avert them. Therefore she performs her duties with dedication and a sense of mission to her people, convinced that it is the gift of Izibe, 'God'. (Plate 56 shows Janet Adibagha, priestess of Odumgbirigbiri and Kaigo Oyi, priestess of Ekine-gbugbu).

4. **Mrs. Preye Jakan, Priestess of Ekinegbugbu:**

Preye Jakan became aware of her idiomu in the early years of her marriage, especially when she lost her first child suddenly, without any sickness. By this time, she had already heard from other women what that meant; they therefore regarded this development as a major signal to



them. Another signal was that she too became sick and refused to recover. As a result, Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi was approached, who revealed after divining that she was wanted by the deity called Ekinogbugbu. A warning was also given that she would die except she worshipped it. But she merely reported the matter to her husband and disregarded the whole matter. Then she became pregnant and it was prophesied that the child would die, and the pregnancy would simply be wasted.

She was then taken to Nimbaraye Abasi for the second time and she was given a mark on her forehead with a chalk. The mark was to identify her with her new marital relationship with idiomu-amini, 'water deity'; and that she has been set apart as a follower, worshipper and priestess. With this mark, she had no more resistance. Her will and life were now captured and she finally stopped resisting. This displeased her father who was a baptized and confirmed member of the Anglican church. But she had no other choice, neither did he.

Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi then superintended over her initiation ceremony so that the idiomu will be formally brought into their dwelling place. But in spite of all the drumming and incantations, she was not possessed, but remained normal. They thought taking her to the river would help; but remembering how long Janet Adibagha was captured in the water, they tied a long piece of cloth round her waist and her husband held the end of it as she went into the water.

As soon as she went into the water, she surprisingly saw two tables before her upon which were placed bales of cloth on one, and crates of minerals, beer and several tins of corned beef, on the other. The table with the bales of cloth was manned by a white man who beckoned at her to come and collect her presents. The man on the other table also did the same. Just then, a deity called Benikurukuru stopped her from advancing and said, "You cannot go to them. I am the senior among them all; you must come to me and be mine". She therefore returned frustrated and disappointed, and narrated her experience to the people. This meant she cannot be possessed until her deity had been named. Another initiation ceremony was therefore rescheduled.

This time the sacrificial items included the following: 1 tin of corned beef, 7 eggs, 2 hens, all completely white in colour, 4 bottles of fanta orange, 1 bottle of coca-cola, and 7 bottles of sprite. She was dipped in the water 6 times, and at the 7th time, she took all the items mentioned into the water with her. This time, she saw the white man who talked to her in English and said: "Goodbye, I have been stopped by Benikurukuru from reaching you. Therefore goodbye; we shall see again". Thus she came back disappointed once again. But that night, Ekinogbugbu appeared before her in a dream and encouraged her not to be afraid. She was promised to be taught about the various kinds of herbs and their uses especially in the cure of such diseases like epilepsy, chicken pox, measles, and other sicknesses. She was assured that nothing will be too hard

for her, and that there was so much in store for her. Therefore she needed not to be afraid. But in order to acquire all these powers, she must first appease the deity Benikurukuru. This was one of the most powerful but most dreaded water deities.

Madam Nimbaraye Abasi therefore decided to perform another sacrifice to appease Benikurukuru. After this, as she travelled in her canoe on the following day down the river, a wooden doll baby suddenly surfaced in front of her, which she took home. On hearing about the doll baby, Mrs. Janet Adibagha confirmed that it was a sign that her deity has been named. Thus, Nimbaraye Abasi was invited again to complete the rites of her initiation. For this, those who were experts in 'apata music', that is, music made with pitchers and accompaniments, were assembled. Once they began to beat the drums, making music with the pitchers, and as they began to sing the songs which are traditional with such occasions, she was finally possessed by Ekinogbugbu, her deity, to the delight of all.<sup>24</sup>

#### The Benefits:

She was delighted as well because of the following benefits. First, as priestess of Ekinogbugbu, she will be bestowed with the knowledge of the uses of various herbs. This would make her a herbalist, a profession that has remained lucrative in the community, and in various parts of Nigeria. Secondly, she will also be endowed with the knowledge of a diviner, and many will come to her for the purpose of

divination. Thirdly, she will also become a 'seer', onyo-moni-eti, a word in Epie-Atissa literally meaning, 'one who sees things'. They are grouped on similar levels as the prophets in the prayer houses, hence it is a highly respected profession in the community. Thus, the prospects of becoming a herbalist, diviner and seer meant that her position in society will be highly enhanced. These prospects made her happy and excited.

But in order for all these to be effected, the deity visited her at night and gave her instructions in connection with sleeping arrangements. The instructions were to the effect that she was to sleep alone on the night of every edewiyedeke, 'the heathens' Sabbath day'. She was to sleep away from her husband in the shrine, and there she will be accompanied by the deity who will come to her in his human form, to have intercourse with her. She was also to sleep alone in the shrine on every Saturday night, when the deity will return to teach her about various herbs, their names and uses, and especially the diseases each could cure. Furthermore, it is during such nights that certain mysteries will be revealed to her together with their appropriate remedies. Therefore the rights of her natural husband over her had been forfeited. She was therefore instructed to tell her natural husband to pay the deity for *making love to* her ; otherwise he was to desist from touching her forthwith. As a result, a day was fixed for her husband to pay the deity for tampering with the laps of his wife who was now also married to the deity. This was performed in a

special ceremony known in Epie-Atissa as, eke kpen edu, meaning, 'laps payment ceremony', which will now be described.

Laps Payment Ceremony:

This ceremony of 'eke kpen edu' begins after the husband has bought for the wife a fathom of white cloth which the wife ties over her laps. She was also given the sum of seven shillings used for the payment. With these, the husband was also to provide necessary items for sacrifice such as, a tin of corned beef, a packet of biscuits, seven cups of rice, some bitter cola and alligator pepper. These were put into a dish and covered up for the wife to carry. These were then taken to the sand bank called Perebumo, meaning, 'sandbank for the rich', near the village of Ogu where the rite is normally celebrated. Again, Madam Nimbaraye Abasi superintended over the ceremony, which started with the invocation of the name of Ekinogbugbu, the idiomu for which Preye Jakan was priestess. The white cloth now tied firmly to her lap, Preye Jakan was now asked to go into the river with the sacrificial items as her idiomu was waiting. Madam Nimbaraye Abasi advised her to endure and be bold, as the ordeal could be frightening. As she went into the river with the sacrificial items, Nimbaraye Abasi continued to invoke the name of the idiomu, informing him to show up. Suddenly, Preye Jakan said she discovered that a big odumu, 'python' began licking her hands and the contents of the plate. She was frightened at first, but since she had already been warned, she therefore endured as long as

possible. By the time the python left, and she also came out of the water, nothing was left again in the dish. The python had taken away everything. They then returned home with singing and dancing<sup>25</sup> that all has been successful.

Having arrived home, they now shared the balance of what was left of the sacrificial items to all the various priests, priestesses and devotees of the various divinities in the community. This was normal because in such sacrifices, the people of the earth do not taste any of it until those in the water had taken their share. It is only then that the worshippers could share the balance in a communal meal. This was also an indication that the person concerned had now been fully admitted into 'the deities cult', otherwise called, agbila igbani idiomu. Now the husband was free to sleep together with her, except on the two days indicated.

In addition to these four, others who have undergone similar ordeals include, Elfrida Otokito, priestess of Benikurukuru, one of the ladies who had three years of elementary school education. In her ordeal, she was also very sickly and experienced being oppressed night after night by a fat, black figure, which she initially mistook to be the handwork of witchcraft, until it was discovered that it was the deity called Benikurukuru. But when she submitted herself to it, her previous sicknesses of constant bleeding and complicated pains and aches, together with a history of miscarriages and children mortality, all subsided. Another lady is Kaigo Oyi, priestess of Ekine-gbugbu, who completed elementary

school in 1982, and was a baptized member of the Anglican church. Her father was also a strong member of the Anglican church. But when her sickness of constant dizziness and fainting fits started, all the known injections and tablets administered by Mr. Victor Abasi, the chemist in the community, could not help her. Her father's faith in the Anglican church gave way, and she was inevitably forced beyond her control to accept worshipping this deity. (See Plate 56, with Kaigo Oyi, left and Janet Adibagha, right). Mina Igbomu, priestess of Benikurukuru, was also an ardent member of the Anglican church. But when the pressure came upon her, in which she lost one of twin children, then when both she and the other surviving twin also became sick unto death, she too had to obey. The tenth woman is Dimuna Abasi, priestess of Onugo, who became barren for failing to bow to idiomu. In addition, she too became very sickly and miserable until she agreed to serve idiomu. Now the deity she is serving has given her the special ability and skill to perform the functions of a midwife. She also specializes in the skill of massage, from which the community has benefitted since 1978. Another medium called Iweni Obi, priestess of Odumgbome, lost 10 children, and she became ill, the medical doctor at Yenagoa General Hospital discharged her to go and die at home. She regained her health only after she decided to submit herself to the idiomu.

#### Camwood Deity:

While all these are concentrated at Ogu, there is the case





**PLATE 57** - Mrs. Yoroboyegha  
Nwankoya, priestess of Camwood  
deity who practises midwifery and  
has established a mini-maternity  
home at Famgbe.

**PLATE 58** - Mrs. Yoroboyegha  
Nwankoya and her 2 sons.

**PLATE 59** - Mrs. Nwankoya with 3  
boys who were delivered by her.

of Mrs. Yoroboyegha Nwankoya, priestess of Selegidi, the Camwood deity, at Famgbe. She is about 55 years old, married with two children, but underwent a most painful ritual calling, because she was initially reluctant. But having since submitted herself, she too has been given the gift of the use of herbs and the special gift of midwifery. She is also gifted with helping women who are barren to become pregnant. Now people refer all difficult and complicated delivery cases to her, to the extent that her home has almost become a mini-maternity home. (See Plate 57, which shows Mrs. Nwankoya, with a bottle and glass of drink in both hands, flanked by some of her pregnant patients. Seated in front are three children, who probably may not have survived, but for her special skills. In Plate 58, she is in the shrine of the Camwood deity with her two sons; and in Plate 59, the three boys who have survived through her help are only too happy to join her for a photograph).

### Summary

This section on the ritual calling of women to mediumship can be summarized by briefly reviewing some of the peculiarities. It seems obvious that the ritual calling of these women, as it occurs in Epie-Atissa, can be divided into 5 main stages. First, the signs, followed by a second aspect, which is the affliction of sickness which cannot be remedied or cured. This leads to the third aspect which is

the inevitable surrender of the will and life of the individual to the idionu or 'divinity' concerned. Fourthly, the various initiation ceremonies that culminate in the medium being possessed by the divinity, and finally, the bestowal of specific abilities or gifts. The ritual calling therefore follows a given pattern which can be identified by those who are familiar with them.

Thus, when a deity picks a prospective medium, it does so by revealing certain signs, which are either observable or heard only by the particular medium and no one else. With particular reference to Miederi Abadiofoni, in addition to noise, the water level suddenly rose, almost to submerge her. She also experienced funny feelings of possession by an overwhelming force whenever she heard the beating of drums. Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi, priestess of Orueperemo, saw the strange sign of a 'spoon', igasi swimming towards her canoe, until it actually jumped into the canoe. Similarly, Janet Adibagha, priestess of Odumgbirigbiri, saw the strange sign of a 'walking stick', ugbolo swimming after her and her husband as they travelled together in the canoe. She too had problems listening to the beating of drums because it caused the manifestation of possession related traits. Other strange signs include, occasions on which prospective mediums pick up colourful dishes, saucers, bedspreads, basins and 'manillas', ada-igbogi from the water while bathing. Preye Jakan was given a mark on the forehead, indicating the marital relationship between the two. The encounter could also be in the form of dreams in which

divinity communicates with the medium.

It is when these signs are ignored and the person fails to submit to divinity that the person becomes penalized with sickness, which cannot be cured with modern medicine until the person submits. Such experiences may include miscarriages, barrenness, infant mortality; ceaseless pains and aches all over the body; bleeding, dizziness and fainting fits. These sicknesses may hit the patient with such severity that all those concerned become desperate for the patient's safety, until the patient agrees to worship the idiomu in order to live.

It seems interesting that all the ten priestesses at Ogu were married; none was single. Almost all had children, except one who was barren. It therefore differs from the ~~view~~ expressed by Kilson, that in Ga society, the mediums are normally barren.<sup>26</sup> Again seven of the ten women indicated at Ogu were baptized members of the Anglican church and Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi, priestess of Orueperemo, and number two 'mother' or inaa had led the Anglican Church Women's Association in the community. Three of them completed, or almost completed elementary school education. Therefore they were not women who were childless, illiterate and without any kind of faith, as in the case of the Ga.<sup>27</sup> But they were women of worth and great value in the community. This is therefore a situation in which idiomu decided to select the best girls among many. This may account for the reason for the fierce resistance, which was

of course, of no avail. They succumbed one by one, facing the inevitable. This meant their will and life were captured by idiomu into full and total surrender, which in Epie-Atissa is called the stage of mu, meaning, 'over-powered', hence 'possession' stage.

This leads to the fourth stage, the stage of initiation and consummation of the marriage between idiomu and his medium. Here the woman is led to the abode of the bride-groom in the water, with appropriate sacrifices. There, the bride is entertained with water by the groom, as in the case of Janet Adibagha, or caressed as in the case of Preye Jakan, priestess of Ekinogbugbu. Following this initiation ceremony, the natural husband is now required to pay for the laps of his wife to the idiomu in a 'laps payment ceremony'. This entitles him to sleep with his wife 5 days, of the 7 days in the week. The remaining 2 days belong to the deity.

This then leads to the final stage in which the medium is now bestowed with special abilities, in which she is elevated to the position of leadership in the community. She is given the gift of the knowledge of the uses of the various herbs; how they could be used to cure diseases such as epilepsy, chicken pox, measles, barrenness, etc. They also receive the knowledge of divination together with the gift of Moneti, 'the ability to perceive', 'see'. They also receive the ability to communicate with divinity so that esoteric knowledge regarding mysteries is acquired for the benefit of the community. In this regard, Janet Adibagha's

'walking stick' divination is noteworthy. The mediums also acquire the special gift of midwifery and massage,<sup>28</sup> because they are more equipped to deal with cases tampered with by witchcraft. The medium therefore becomes an important personality in the community. They have no taboos of office except to be in total submission to the divinity who directs accordingly.

## CHAPTER 6

### FOOTNOTES

1. L. de Heusch, Pourquoi l'épouser? (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p.274.
2. Renaat Devisch, 'Perspectives in Divination in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa', in Wim Van Binsbergen and Matthew Schoffeleers, Theoretical Explorations in African Religion (London: 1985), p.56.
3. R.E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom, op. cit., pp.58 and 160.
4. Ibid., p.58.
5. Idem; also see E.B. Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., pp. 170ff, on the importance of the head to the Yoruba in relation to destiny.
6. cf. P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, op. cit., p.140.
7. Ibid, pp. 90-91.
8. E. M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba, op.cit, p.9.
9. Idem.
10. R. E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom, op. cit., p.55.
11. Francis Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, op.cit., p.55.
12. Chieka Ifemesia, Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo, op.cit., p.71.
13. Francis Arinze, op.cit., p.76. Also see C. Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe (London, 1937), pp. 28--31.
14. See G. O. M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op.cit., pp. 22-23.
15. For further explanations about this, see the following: A. Zempleni, 'La Dimension thérapeutique du culte des Rab: Ndop et Samp, rites de possession chez les Lebou et les Wolof', Psychopathologie Africaine, 2 (1966), pp.295-439; also A. Zempleni, 'De la persecution a la

culpabilite, in C. Piault (ed.), Prophetisme et therapeutique: Albert Atcho et la Communaute de Bregbo (Paris: 1975), pp.153-218; Paul Bohannan, 'Tiv Divination', in John Beattie and R. Lienhardt (eds.), Studies in Social Anthropology (Oxford: 1975), pp.149-166; M. Jackson, 'An Approach to Kuranko Divination', Human Relations (London: 1978), 31, pp.117-138;; A. Retel-Laurentin, 'La Force de la parole', in J. Vernant, et. al., Divination et rationalite (Paris: 1974), pp.295-319).

16. See G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.28.

17. Idem.

18. cf. E.E. Bradbury, op. cit., p.99.

19. cf. G.O.M. Tasie, op. cit., p.29.

20. Noteworthy is the fact that Epie-Atissa are situated in the fresh water areas of the Niger Delta where people's fishing methods vary according to the season. It is necessary to emphasize this point because the methods applied for fishing during the flood season which lasts from some time in August to late November are different from those used during the dry season, when children could also use their cloth or wrappers as fishing gears. They could do this during the dry season only, near the sandbanks while their mothers are farming. The fish they catch are tiny, little ones, like crayfish, called bedetie, which are not capable of tearing any kind of cloth. For details concerning other methods of fishing in parts of Epie-Atissa, see J.H. Jennings and S.O. Oduah, A Geography of the Eastern Province of Nigeria (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp.82-84.

21. P.A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, op. cit., pp.282-285, discusses how 'manillas', ada-igbogi, meaning 'father of money', came to be regarded as a form of currency in parts of the Niger Delta. It began with the Portuguese who used them as means of exchange for slaves; but that it may have originated as a kind of ring money either from the Egyptians, or the Phoenicians or the Carthaginian traders.

22. What obtains in Epie-Atissa in connection with the relationship between the woman and the idiomu are identical with what obtains among the Ga people of South-Eastern Ghana. In both cases, as well as in other places, Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religion', Journal of Religion in Africa, 4 (1971/72) p.174, expresses the view that once a woman accepts to be a medium of any divinity, the relationship between them is seen in terms of husband and wife. This relationship persists until the death of the medium. But any of the children may be selected thereafter.

23. Again, according to Kay Williamson and A.O. Timitimi, 'A Note on Ijo Number Symbolism', African Notes, vol. 5, 3 (1970), p.14, seven as a number is "reserved for



the great divinities and the dead". In this case Janet Adibagha was not dead, but she was being entertained by three great divinities, including the most dreaded Ekine. As a result, each of the divinities gave her water seven times, which may confirm the view that seven is their number.

24. Here it seems apparent that response to the call to become priestess of any idiomu is synonymous with possession, known in Epie-Atissa as mu, meaning 'arrest' or 'overpower'. This does not convey the same meaning as 'catch', indicated by G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit. p.30. This is because in Epie-Atissa thought, something that is merely caught could escape; but that which is 'overpowered' cannot escape. Thus hot drinks like kaikai may 'catch' someone, then clear up later; but idiomu 'overpowers', so that the person can never escape but submit. This evidence also eliminates deceit or any pretence.

25. A point worth noting is the importance attached to singing and dancing, with a variety of drums, which constitute 'possession' ceremonies. There are no masquerades and associated dances in Epie-Atissa as are known to be common in Kalabari area. Robin Horton, The Gods As Guests, op. cit., pp. 28ff, portrays a lot of this in Kalabari area. But in Epie-Atissa, once possessed, the medium is expected to sing and dance in ways peculiar to the particular idiomu.

26. cf. Marion Kilson, op. cit., p.174.

27. Idem.

28. J. Middleton, Lugbara Religion: Ritual and Authority among an East African People (London: 1960), Chapter 4, would include those aspects in which the medium performs the functions of a herbalist, and midwifery as the obstetric function of divination. In other words, since most of what they do are performed in the context of divination, it means these two aspects could be regarded as the medical function of divination.

## CHAPTER 7

### RITUAL OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH DIVINATION IN EPIE-ATISSA

Divination in Epie-Atissa is performed by the various priests in their various shrines, and in strict consultation with the divinities concerned. This therefore makes the actual practice of divination in Epie-Atissa to be very ritualistic. Each particular ritual performed makes use of specific ritual objects or paraphernalia which are identified as divinatory devices or divinatory 'symbols', isini-maasam, meaning, 'something which represents something'. This is a compound word in which isini, refers to any inanimate object, which when 'venerated' kene, gets animated and becomes idiomu, 'deity' (see above, Chapter 5, pp.306-307). The word maasam, may<sup>be</sup> translated as 'semblance' or 'stand for', as in the case of Orisa represented in the form of a human being (see at Plate 8). In this case, the image is a good example of isini-maasam, representing the deity, Orisa, which has become an embodiment or symbol of power, protection and source of help to the numerous clients.

Another good example is that of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, in which the various rituals associated with its 'veneration', kene, give various expressions to ways in which Aruku-eken has become symbolic to people at Famgbe. J.R. Hinnells defines ritual as "patterned behaviour, often communal,

consisting of prescribed actions performed periodically and/or repetitively".<sup>1</sup> Associated with rituals are specific rites which Hinnells defines as ritual actions or practice, "including physical movements and any accompanying words",<sup>2</sup> which may include, "rites of passage (transition rites, e.g. of initiation or at puberty); intensification rites (promoting or celebrating joint activity), and piacular rites (to do with cleansing, forgiveness, or expiation)".<sup>3</sup> None of these rituals could be performed in Epie-Atissa without the approval and prescription of the pattern, by the deities through divination, and ritual objects meant for one rite are not used for another, because there are stringent taboos.

It is therefore the purpose of this chapter to look at some of these ritual objects and the extent to which some have become symbols in Epie-Atissa divinatory practices. It also examines the extent to which these symbols portray reality in Epie-Atissa, and the extent of institutionalized variations. It seeks to find out if some of the ritual objects and symbols in Epie-Atissa have associations in other cultures, and especially how they are formed or even transformed, and their possible mnemonic functions.<sup>4</sup> As a result, discussions will centre on the following: abiala, 'flag', aki, 'pitcher', azuzu, 'fan', egbele, 'calabash', egbelegbele, 'horn', eze-som, 'talking drum', igbeme, 'bell', ogele, 'gong', utiin, 'chalk', ugbogbo, 'clay pot' uvun-efeni, 'bird's feather', and other related objects and symbols.

Abiala, 'flag'

In the course of this field work in Epie-Atissa, one of the signals for the obvious presence of a 'shrine', ugula in a particular village was the presence of <sup>an</sup> abiala, 'flag', in a specific location in that village. If the village was situated along the road, then the abiala, usually white in colour will be seen attached to a pole that has been erected in a conspicuous location along the road, near the ugula. Such a flag served as a sign to anyone who was looking for a diviner that there was one close by. If the village was near the river, then the flag was close to the waterside as a similar sign to those who were travelling by canoe along the river, as in the case of Aruku-eken at Famgbe (See above Chapter 5, p.326).

In this respect therefore, the 'flag', abiala is a sign indicating the presence of deity, to which one may go for divinatory consultation, and also a 'symbol', isini-maasam of the particular deity in question. Hence to tamper with it is to tamper with deity itself. As a sign, the 'flag', abiala corresponds with the sign boards of Madam Erekalayefa Tinbiri of Ikolo, priestess of oloko divination, and Prophet Orioko Dangolo, priest of Epie-Bottle Divination, whose businesses are registered (see at Plates 32 and 43, respectively). It can therefore be stated that the concept of the registration of centres for divination is a

variation of that of abiala, the 'flag'. This ~~can~~ be explained from the fact that as the business of divination becomes more competitive and more commercialized in Epie-Atissa, the need to advertise ~~will~~ also arise.

In the past, a majority of people in Epie-Atissa were not able to read and write, so that information was passed on orally and by means of signs. But now that illiteracy is being eradicated gradually, some of the literate priests and diviners, in their attempt to modernize would probably prefer to utilize more modern techniques, like 'the point of sale advertising', as in the case of Orioko Dangolo. In addition to the commercial advantage, the registration with the government and the license given protect the diviner against risks of prosecution for operating illegally, especially in the case of any mishap. This point was mentioned by both Madam Erekalayefa Tinbiri, priestess of oloko divination at Ikolo, and Madam Yoroboyegha Nwankoya, priestess of the Camwood deity at Famgbe. Both were taken to court by certain members of the community for declaring by means of divination that certain individuals were witches and wizards while they were still alive. Madam Nwankoya was probably fined and seriously warned by the law enforcement agents, but Madam Erekalayefa Tinbiri narrowly escaped an official destruction of her shrine by the court simply because she was registered and licensed.

The historical basis for the use of abiala 'flag' as a divinatory and cultic symbol in Epie-Atissa is not clear.

But it has been indicated by Tasie that among the various kinds of shrines in the Kalabari area, one consists "barely of some mangrove plant hung around with pieces of cloth, usually white shirting".<sup>5</sup> This was indicative of the fact that the area was inhabited by divinity, and the piece of white shirting hung around the mangrove plant was a symbolic flag of the divinity, and a sign of divine presence. There may therefore be a link between what obtains in Epie-Atissa and in Kalabari.

In the past people made use of abiala, 'flag' in Epie-Atissa on several occasions other than religious. For example, a flag of a reasonable size was usually held either by the champion or a member of the community during inter-village wrestling matches. It was usually pinned to the stern of the canoe if the visiting team came by the river, as an indication of strength. In this way abiala could be seen as a social symbol. This would contrast with the national flag which will be regarded as a political symbol. No matter what it symbolized, whether religious, social or political, Cirlot has suggested that historically, "the flag or banner derives from totemistic insignia as found in Egypt and, indeed, in most countries."<sup>6</sup> Characteristically, all flags "are found at the top of a pole or mast".<sup>7</sup> In the case of the Kalabari, it is simply hung to a mangrove plant, as already indicated. But abiala has to be kept in this raised position and not allowed to fall. According to Cirlot, this is because it is:

expressive of a kind of imperious exaltation, or the will to 'heighten' the spiritual significance of the figure or animal by raising it above the normal level. From this is derived the general symbolism of the banner as a sign of victory and self-assertion.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps Harvest Izonfatei's experience in 1974, (see p.326) may support the idea of 'imperious exaltation' attached to abiala in Epie-Atissa, together with the concept of 'victory and self assertion'.

### Aki, 'pitcher'

The 'pitcher', aki, was mentioned in connection with the ritual calling of Mrs. Preye Jakan, priestess of ekinegbugbu (see above, Chapter 6, pp.368f). In that case, it indicated that experts in 'apata music' attended to her initiation. Again, this is music, the instruments of which are 'pitchers', aki and other accompaniments, such as some of the women devotees who clapped their hands, sang and danced to the aki music. The purpose was to cause the initiate to be possessed by the deity she was to serve.

In the shrine of Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi divination, are a number of 'pitchers', aki. They are of various sizes, and are usually filled somewhat with water before being used for 'apata music'. They are also usually supported by other drums (see at Plate 36). The expert drummers know what rhythm to play in order to induce possession on the initiate. Since 'possession', mu, is in

this case a necessary factor to the acquisition of esoteric wisdom or powers from divinity, the 'pitcher', aki is a very important symbol in bringing about possession in mediums. It is therefore used to adorn the 'shrine' ugula as some of the relevant cultic and divinatory paraphernalia.

### Ugbogbo, 'clay pot'

Closely linked with the 'pitcher, aki, is the 'clay pot', ugbogbo, which usually holds the potent power of the deity in the 'shrine' ugula. In recognition of this special function, it has been given the special cultic name, asain which has already been discussed (see at Chapter 2, note 39).

The use of the asain gained prominence in Epie-Atissa during the days of inter-village and inter-tribal warfare. According to Egedegu Ekpeku, who is regarded as the ebeni-eken idiomu, 'the priest in charge of cultic matters' at Swali, who was interviewed on Tuesday, 22 October, 1985, the asain divination was very popular then. The community did not go to war or embark upon any risky expedition without due consultations with the asain. It was the 'medicinal' clay pot in the shrine, which when consulted during emergencies, would either 'boil over', thus showing victory, or remain 'calm', indicating defeat. In time, the asain itself became deified and is now addressed by people at Swali as one of their communal divinities, with the title



asain-gidi-gidi, in reference to the ancient legendary power of this cultic vessel which was capable of 'boiling over' without the application of fire.

A good example of this could be seen in the shrine of Mrs. Erekalayefa Tinbiri, priestess of oloko divination at Ikolo (see at Plate 34). Ordinarily, it is called ugbogbo, 'clay pot'; but it ceases to be an ordinary clay pot as soon as it becomes a cultic symbol in the 'shrine', ugula. In the case of Mrs. Erekalayefa Tinbiri, she dedicated the ugbogbo, 'claypot' to her divinity, called Bekenowei, meaning 'whiteman', so that it became the receptacle for the oloko divination instrument. As could be seen in Plate 34, asain, 'the medicinal pot', is never placed on the ground, but always upheld above the ground.

In other cases, it is believed that the medicines consisting of herbs mixed with water have curative effects, and are therefore applied to heal the sick. Thus in cases where the use of herbs are necessary following a divinatory seance, such herbs must be kept in the asain in the 'shrine', ugula, for a period of time in order to receive divine sanction and potency before being administered to the patient. Again, Chief Egedegu Ekpeku of Swali has suggested that some women had had their barrenness cured by drinking the herbs from the asain. They could also serve as redressive medicines against the attack of witchcraft and other evil medicines. Therefore the ugbogbo, 'clay pot', performs an important function in the divinatory process as the cultic instrument

called asain.

But Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken who was interviewed on Friday, 9 August, 1985, gave some reasons to explain why some 'clay pots', ugbogbo were kept perpetually in the 'shrine' ugula of Aruku-eken. In his opinion, he thinks both the 'clay pitcher', aki and the 'clay pot', ugbogbo have become important cultic and divinatory symbols because they have been associated with the shrines in Epie-Atissa for several years. The reason is that the forefathers preferred to venerate their deities with tombo, 'palm wine' in the days of old, instead of kaikai, 'palm gin', as it is today. He further explained that the best container for tombo was the clay pitcher. And since Aruku-eken in particular was 'venerated' kene once a year, the clay pitcher was usually filled for that purpose, with tombo. The deity, the ancestors believed, cannot be effectively worshipped, revered and adored, if tombo was lacking. Thus the clay pitcher gradually became an important cultic and divinatory symbol since all those who came for divinatory purposes were also required to supply tombo, which was used for libations during the invocations that preceded divination. Hence wherever tombo was used for cultic purposes in Epie-Atissa, the clay pot became very symbolic as tombo container for divinity.



**PLATE 63** - Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba, holds a 'staff of office', ugbolo, with his right hand, and azuzu, 'fan' with the left. These constitute aspects of his cultic regalia.

Azuzu, 'the fan'

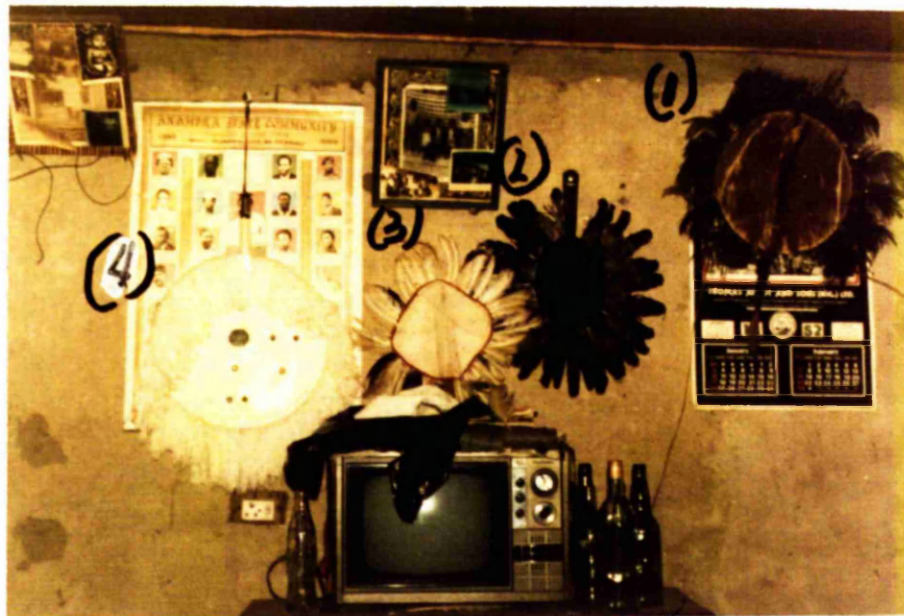
Another very significant divinatory symbol in Epie-Atissa is the 'fan', azuzu, which almost all the known diviners in the community hold in their hands in their official and cultic capacities as priests and priestesses. It therefore seems probable that to them, azuzu is also a status symbol, to the extent that those who hold it are regarded as the recognized diviners, priests and priestesses, while those who do not hold it are not so recognized.

The fans vary in size and quality, the acquisition of which probably depends on the financial ability of the individual concerned. Thus in Plate 63, Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa, at Akaba, can be seen in the 'shrine', ugula of Orisa in his full priestly attire which would otherwise be incomplete without the azuzu, 'fan'. Standing next to Orisa, he holds his 'staff of office', ugbolo with his right hand, and the azuzu with the left. It can be seen that his azuzu is wearing out, probably owing to much use, and it may have lasted a long period of time because it was one of the items with which he was initiated as chief priest of Aruku-egene in 1965. Other items that constitute his full regalia as already indicated, include white bed spread, white shirt and hat, white eagle's feathers pinned to his hat (see above, Chapter 6, p.340). The fact that everything white except the azuzu and the ugbolo, recalls the Egyptian concept that white was "expressive of earthly omnipotence"<sup>9</sup> which was

used to adorn places in Memphis. Quite a good number of the priests and priestesses and diviners see white as the colour of purity and sanctity, hence appreciated by divinity.

The azuzu held by Simeon Tinbiri is made of palm fronds, which in addition to other "vegetable materials are used to make a wide variety of items for the home and market".<sup>10</sup> It is therefore one of the items prepared with local materials that are available in large quantities and in most of the forests in Nigeria, hence sold inexpensively. Originally, 'the fan', azuzu is used for a variety of purposes. Firstly, women use it to fan up the fire as they cooked in the kitchen. It is easier this way than to blow the firewood with their mouths. Secondly, people use it to drive away flies and other insects from them as they relaxed during the day; and at nights, it is employed to smack mosquitoes. But more importantly, older people use it to fan themselves in the tropical heat, both while out in the shade or in the home, especially in the rural areas. In time, it became a symbol of prestige for the elderly, especially for the chiefs and paramount rulers who employed helpers to fan them both in private and during their many public engagements. As a result, many gradually abandoned the one made cheaply with palm fronds, for the more expensive and elegant ones, made with leather.

Later, however, the azuzu gradually became identified as an aspect of Epie-Atissa culture, and it became easily adopted by the traditional rulers, and also those who served the



**PLATE 64** - Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, displays his various azuzu, 'fans' in his residence. Note their variations and colours.

community and private divinities as priests and priestesses. Thus while the azuzu held by Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa seems old and has started to disintegrate, Madam Miederi Abadiofoni, priestess of Lokobide at Ogu, is also holding a similar one (see at Plate 55). Hers is bigger and noticeably newer; and as the symbol of her authority, it is firmly held in her right hand, inside her shrine.

Mr. Harvest Izonfatei, however, departs from this traditional type for a more expensive azuzu, made of white horse leather, the white wool serving as special decoration (see at Plate 24). But explaining why he prefers this particular 'fan', azuzu, the chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe said, idiomu, 'divinity' showed him a specially well decorated fan in a dream in 1975. It was directed in that dream that Chief B.L.W. Mabinton, the Ebeni-Ibe, 'clan head' of Atissa was to present it to him in recognition of his status as the chief priest of Aruku-eken. This particular azuzu was made of solid animal skin, that is leather, and the sides were decorated with ostrich feathers. Chief Mabinton delayed in fulfilling this dream, so someone else bought it in Kano, Northern Nigeria, and presented it to him. But in 1985, Chief Mabinton brought the one he is now holding, made of white horse leather, and the wool as decoration. He also has a third azuzu also made of leather but decorated with the feathers of a hawk, a bird of prey. These various azuzu, 'fans' are displayed on the wall of the chief priest's sitting room, as indicated in Plate 64.

There are four fans in Plate 64. The pattern adopted by Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken, is that all four fans are made of leather. None is made of palm-fronds or any vegetable materials. The first from the right, is decorated with ostrich feathers; the second with the feathers of hawk, and these two are identical in shape. The third is also decorated with hawks' feathers, but in this case, the feathers are white indicating that they were plucked from a hawk that had advanced remarkably in age. The chief priest was of the opinion that white hawks' feathers are more acceptable to Aruku-eken for all ritual purposes than those used in decorating the second fan which were from much younger species. The fourth is the white horse leather and wool azuzu, which is even more preferred for ritual purposes both because of the significance of white colour and the underlying swiftness of the horse. Aruku-eken does his things swiftly, like a horse.

While it can be seen that all the four azuzu just described would be more expensive than those made with palm-fronds, the azuzu in the hand of Andusugurugha Benson Adadiofoni, chief priest of Utoken, 'the Earth deity', at Ogu, seems even more elegant and more expensive than all the rest (see at Plate 47). His is also of leather but of a higher quality and seems to be more solid. The decorations are different from any just described; they are artistic designs showing three stars and two horns. It is not certain whether these decorations were applied locally.





**PLATE 65** - Mrs. Better Wilson,  
priestess of igilasi divination  
at Kpansia holding her 'fan',  
azuzu as an indication of her  
priestly rank.

By contrast, the azuzu held by Chief Marla Abasi, the eben-eken of Ogu, which is decorated with ostrich feathers, does not convey the same weight of authority as that of the priest of Utoken. This is because the first one seems to convey a deeper meaning than what meets the eyes.

Nonetheless, Wilfrid D. Hambly has suggested that "the use of fans of leather and ostrich plumes suggest an Egyptian origin, possibly from the Nile Valley, through North Africa and across the Sahara."<sup>11</sup> The fact that this is most likely is attested by Wallis Budge who thinks there are Egyptian inscriptions which indicate that Osiris was "the fan-bearer on the right hand of the king, Amen, Amen-mes of Thebes."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, that "the ostrich was well known to the Egyptians of all periods, and the eggs of the bird were buried with the dead."<sup>13</sup> Thus, while the fans held by Simeon Tinbiri, Chief Priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa and Madam Miederi Abadiofoni, priestess of Olokobide, the number one cultic 'mother', inaa at Ogu, are made of vegetable products, an aspect that is culturally native to Epie-Atissa, the rest are foreign, giving rise to a variety of implications.

Another woman who also holds a 'fan', azuzu by virtue of her own rank in Epie area is Mrs. Better Wilson, priestess of Igilasi divination at Kpansia (see at Plate 65). As a part of her regalia, the azuzu is held in her right hand, and the horse's tail on the left. But Mrs. Janet Adibagha, priestess of Odumgbirigbiri, and her friend, Mrs. Mina Igbomu, priestess of Benikurukuru may not be allowed to hold



**PLATE 66** - Mrs. Janet Adibagha and Mina Igbomu do not hold 'fans', azuzu, probably because they are still too junior in rank to do so.

any azuzu as yet. This is because they are still too junior to be given that privilege (see at Plate 66).

It therefore seems interesting that azuzu, 'fan', which began as a simple domestic material in Epie-Atissa, has become an important social and cultic symbol. It becomes a traditional and social symbol when it is in the hands of a traditional ruler, but in the hands of priests or priestesses, it is a cultic symbol. It was initially woven with palm fronds, but it has since evolved to the extent it is now made with leather<sup>14</sup> and adorned with the feathers of ostrich, hawk and perhaps also peacock, and horse's wool. Thus from a simple material, it has now become flamboyant and expensive, hence becoming more and more of a status symbol. Since the priests and priestesses dedicate them to their divinities, some believe the azuzu held by such people can be very portent with power, that it could be used to perform many signs and wonders, such as stopping the rain, redirecting the path of thunderbolt, etc.<sup>15</sup> Diviners held the azuzu because it is regarded as one of the mnemonics of their trade.

### Egbele, 'calabash'

Egbele, 'calabash' specifically refers to the gourd whose shell serves for holding liquid. It is used in serving tombo, 'palm-wine' especially in the shrine of Aruku-eken, and the ones so used are called uvol, many of which can be

seen hanging on the wall of this deity at Famgbe for easy replacement in case of breakage following great festivities.

While the origin of the 'gourds', egbele is not quite certain, it is the view of Alison Hodge that "gourds have been known to and used by man throughout history; in sub-Saharan Africa they seem to have been in use at least by the ninth century A.D."<sup>16</sup> It is still used widely in Nigeria, and produced in various shapes and sizes. Functionally, it is used for storing various items, such as water and tombo, 'palm wine' in Epie Atissa area; as container for milk, butter and other dairy products among the pastoral Fulani in northern Nigeria. There are several species of gourds; but the species used predominantly in Epie-Atissa is "the lagenaria vulgaris, the bottle-gourd,"<sup>17</sup> which is also the most common in Nigeria. Because this specie is shaped like a bottle, it could be prepared like a cup, and therefore used in place of a glass, for drinking. When it is used in this way in the shrine it is specifically called uvol.

In the Yoruba area, it is prepared in all shapes and sizes, some in the form of spoons and others in the form of musical instruments. According to Bolaji Idowu, calabash serves as the container for the kola nuts, which are presented by the devotees to Orisa or Ogun as a sign of reverential worship.<sup>18</sup> It is also used during the initiation ceremony of an Ifa priest as a receptacle for the "four principal Odu: Ejiogbe, Oyeku Meji, Ibara Meji and Edi Meji."<sup>19</sup> This

makes it so important that it is also "worshipped as the emblem of a deity".<sup>20</sup>

Apart from this cultic use, it has also become a social symbol. In this regard, Hausa and Yoruba craftsmen colourfully decorate and pyro-engrave calabashes with various motifs that are sold in the markets. Some of the most notable centres in the north are Kano and Maidugari, and in the Yoruba area, Oyo is most noted. Such items may vary from containers fit for wedding presents, to carvings that bear relations to animals like "crocodiles, lizard and bird shapes"<sup>21</sup> which people buy as household decorations and adornments.

Thus in the shrine of Aruku-eken, egbele is used as drinking cup for cultic purposes, called uvol, but worshipped as deity among Ifa priests in Yoruba area. As domestic item, it could be used as container for liquids and edible items. Socially and commercially, it could be elegantly decorated and sold in commercial quantity in various parts of Nigeria; but again in Yoruba area, calabash is used as musical instrument, usually "ornamented with strings of cowries, and is called sekere".<sup>22</sup> Egbele therefore fulfils several functions.

#### Eze-Som, 'Talking Drum'

The importance of eze-som, 'talking drum' and other related





**PLATE 67** - Cultic members of Aruku-eken at Famgbe ready for okumo ceremony, led by Mr. Lot. Note that his right hand is raised as he makes the invocation called lala-ogbo.

**PLATE 68** - Devotees of Orisa at Akaba blowing the 'horn', egbelegbele of Aruku-egene to see the effect.

**PLATE 69** - Picture showing the 'bells', igbeme in the shrine of Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi divination.



drums in general, in the divinatory process in Epie-Atissa, have already been discussed (see Plate 11; chapter 2, p.99; ; chapter 6, p.370), especially in connection with possession in the diviners. The 'talking drum' eze-som performs the important cultic function of being the instrument by means of which the community could be assembled quickly for important cultic events. It is also the main drum used in all such ceremonies, especially in the important Okumo ceremony (see Plate 67).

### The Horn and Bell

Other instruments that are used to draw the attention of idiomu, 'deity', to the medium and to the shrine, beside the 'drum', eze, especially in Epie-Atissa, are the 'horn', egbelegbele (see Plate 68); and 'the bell', igbeme (see at Plate 69). The 'horn', egbelegbele in Plate 68, has been dedicated to Aruku-egene, at Akaba, but is usually kept in the shrine of Orisa because Simeon Tinbiri is the chief priest of both deities. Therefore while visiting with the chief priest and the rest of the cultic personnel at Akaba on Saturday, 27th July, 1985, in the shrine of Orisa, the cultic expert was told to blow the horn of Aruku-egene. He was reluctant at first because he was aware of the consequences. But when he blew 'the horn', egbelegbele, it seemed as though the shrine was suddenly invaded by certain unknown forces, and Simeon Tinbiri, the chief priest was possessed immediately.



**PLATE 70** - Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba is possessed following the blowing of the cultic 'horn', egbelegbele. Note the way the hands are spread then lifted up.



**PLATE 71** - Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba possessed after blowing the cultic horn. Note the change in his eyes and the effect on other devotees.

The obvious indication that he was possessed was, he began to jump with his both hands spread and lifted up (see at Plate 70); his face changed and his eyes soon turned red before all present (see at Plate 71). The rest of the cultic members seemed to have been similarly affected. For example, in Plate 68, Mr. Japan Anyasara, the secretary in the shrine of Orisa, sitting to the right of the man who was blowing the 'horn', egbelegbele, could not withstand the impact of the 'force' or entity that suddenly invaded the shrine, and he 'passed out' into a moment of stupor. Similarly in Plate 71, Mr. John Yogoi Obudu, the expert cultic drummer of eze-som at Akaba, seated to the left in white short sleeve singlet, was also seriously affected and almost fell down from his chair.

A few minutes after that, Simeon Tinbiri the chief priest began to prophesy, saying:

You say he is our son; he is our son! He has come to look for and to know all our secrets. He wants to know our secrets. We should be very careful.

Apparently, what he was saying was in connection with the research being conducted. That they will be giving away their secrets to someone who is not one of them. Perhaps what has been described may correspond with possession trance states among "the Fon and Yoruba",<sup>23</sup> who also reveal "the terrorized expression that passes over the face of the medium as he or she struggles against 'going under'",<sup>24</sup> or

in Epie-Atissa terminology, that of "being captured', mu. Also noteworthy are the eyes and the facial expressions of the man blowing the horn in Plate 68. From this episode, it seems most likely that the blowing of the horn of any animal that has been dedicated to deity, could induce possession trance in a medium, and thus enhance ability to divine more accurately.

The chain of 'bells', igbeme in Plate 69, shows the point of demarcation between the 'outer court' and the 'inner court', in the 'shrine', ugula of Mrs. Better Wilson, priestess of igilasi divination at Kpansia. When she was visited on 14 February, 1985, for an interview, it was granted only after she had sought approval from her 'deity', idiomu called alabo-ingeribo (see at Plate 35; Chapter 3, pp.208-210) Before pouring the necessary libation so that divination may begin, she rang one of the 'bells', igbeme, in order to summon the attention of her 'husband', idiomu. This puts her in a state of ecstasy, during which she receives illumination, insight and revelation concerning the client's problems. In other words, without the bells, Mrs. Better Wilson might find it rather difficult with igilasi divination. The 'bell' igbeme, is therefore important to Better Wilson as the 'horn', egbelegbele is important to Simeon Tinbiri, and the 'drum', eze to Harvest Izonfatei, in the cultic contexts of divination. This may correspond with the symbolism attached to drum in places like Ghana, where according to K.A. Busia, drums are symbolically connected with the ritual installation of chiefs. During that

occasion the talking drum is used to remind the chief "to tread gently, gently; a chief walks gently, majestically, lest he stumble".<sup>25</sup> Among the Ndembu, drums are symbolically attached to many things, one of which is the ritual regarding women's fertility cult. According to Victor Turner, "each type of ritual has its own special drum rhythm, its own theme song, its own combination of medicines, and its own stylized behaviour, expressed in dancing and gestures, and its own type of shrine and ritual apparatus".<sup>26</sup> And in Zande land, witch doctors "dance and divine",<sup>27</sup> holding their seances in public. Therefore drums are symbolically linked with divination in other parts of Africa as well, probably because of the similar reason of inducing possession on the mediums.

### Birds' Feathers

Birds' feathers, locally called uvun-efeni could be regarded as one of the most important symbols of divination in Epie-Atissa. However, it is not every bird's feather that is symbolic, but they are mainly two; feathers from the 'eagle' ugo, and the 'hawk', okpokpo. Even then, eagle's feathers are preferred for certain reasons which were given by Mr. Harvest Izonfatei, Chief Priest of Aruku-eken, at Famgbe, in the company of some of his cultic members, on Friday, August 9, 1985. More specifically, he thinks only the eagle's feather is accepted by Aruku-eken from those who had completed the okumo ceremony. Already a

lot of these feathers have accumulated in the shrine of Aruku-eken, and some have become black in colour and dirty through exposure. Usually the emphasis is that it must be white in colour, indicating that the eagle was an old one. Furthermore, only the feathers from the right wing of an eagle were accepted; those from the left wing were rejected because the left, according to the chief priest, signified female, while the right signified male. Only males are accepted in the shrine of Aruku-eken, but females are tabooed; hence feathers from the left wing are always rejected.

Explaining the importance of the 'eagle', ugo, he stressed that priests of various deities and native-doctors preferred the eagle's feathers, the head and the claws for their cultic and medicinal purposes partly because it is not a common bird. This is because it is generally believed in cultic circles that potions prepared with the addition of these parts from the eagle were more efficacious. He thinks the 'eagle', ugo is better regarded than the 'hawk', okpokpo because the hawk is common, but the eagle is scarce, especially in parts of the Niger Delta.

Nevertheless, both are birds of prey. The significance of using parts from these birds for cultic purposes is that they signify 'power', ukali. Just as other birds cannot subdue them, so also would people find it difficult to subdue those whose potions consisted of parts from these two birds of prey. This may account for the symbolic use of

'eagle', ugo in the coat of arms of some countries. In Calabar and also in Kalakari areas, the eagle is represented in bird dances that venerate the dead.<sup>28</sup> And at Ogu in Epie-Atissa, there seems to be a connection between ancestral worship and white eagles' feathers (see Chapter 5, p.315). Thus white eagles feather represents Utoken at Ogu.

This contrasts with the attire normally worn by the chief priest of Osuneni at Amarata. His attire includes a hat which is decorated with feathers of a 'hawk', okpokpo, not 'eagle', ugo; and a string of coral beads which hang down to the neck. The chief priest is required to be attired in this manner especially on the day that a new member is being initiated into the cult. It is he who receives this new member on behalf of Osuneni, a deity which controls the community's lake.

But both Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba, and Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, whose services relate directly to the ancestral aspects of their communities, are required to pin uvun-ugo, 'eagle's feather', not uvun-okpokpo, 'hawk's feather', on their caps. Again, Simeon Tinbiri's cap is red, like that of the chief priest of Utoken, at Ogu, but bedecked with cowries (see Plates 28 and 46, respectively). But Harvest Izonfatei's cap is white, as well as the uvun-ugo (see Plate 31). Noteworthy is the fact that such attires, especially the pinning of either the eagle's or hawk's feathers, are restricted to male priests, in the

service of communal deities only. Female priests are not allowed to wear any 'feather', uvun, whatsoever.

### Chalk

The importance of 'chalk', utiin as an important cultic and divinatory symbol in Epie-Atissa cannot be over-emphasised. This is because it has its main root from the ceremony of Okumo to which the traditional concepts of poko-adu, 'ringing the right eye', and kee ubo, 'splitting the right hand' properly belong. Since these are basically marks of chivalry and power, divination in the communal shrines does not and cannot begin without the priests and the important devotees putting on these marks with the 'chalk', utiin.

Thus, in the shrine of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, for example, where things are done in the most traditional fashion, the ritual of lala-ogbo is very ceremonial, as indicated earlier (see at Chapter 2, pp. 169f.).

In the shrine of Orisa at Akaba, it is prescribed that 'chalk', utiin could be mixed with salt water for the treatment of her earache, and it is one of the most favourite diets of 'water divinities', idiomu-amini (see at Chapter 2, pp.130f.). In Kalabari, married couples looking for children in the shrine of Owomekasu, are rubbed with "some chalk on the foreheads and chests", <sup>29</sup> at the same time invoking the blessings of the divinity upon them. They



are also given some chalk with which they go home. In this case, the chalk is indicative of the divine presence in their home.

The 'chalk', utiin is symbolic in a variety of ways in the traditional life of the Benin people. First, it is used in mortuary rites in which the hair and nails are cut and the corpse may be preserved in a block of chalk till all arrangements for burial are ready. The deceased is then sent to a place of rest in a procession with singing, during which 'chalk', utiin, 'salt', ugbonu, and 'cowries', okobo, are scattered along the way. The funeral rites usually last between 7 to 14 days, and while the body is laid in state, "the nails and hair which have been preserved from the dead man are tied with chalk, salt and cowries in a white cloth into which a white feather is inserted."<sup>30</sup> This bundle then represents the corpse on account of which a sacrifice of a he-goat is offered before the body is buried.

Then after childbirth, the baby is washed and rubbed with white chalk. And after 3 months, "the mother rubs herself and the child with camwood dye, and clad in herbalist clothes and ornaments, goes to the farm, scattering chalk at each path junction for the spirits that dwell there for the protection of the child."<sup>31</sup> In Benin area, chalk is always included in offerings to ancestral spirits and also used in witch-craft cults in order to detect witches.<sup>32</sup>

Among the Ibo, there is the prevalent opinion that priests

of the various divinities do not dress elegantly, but simply put "chalk around their eyes, a yellow paint on the face and tattered hat".<sup>33</sup> The priests and devotees powder their eyelids and toes with chalk in order to "show that they are in the safe protection of the spirits".<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the cultic symbolism of 'chalk' utiin, seems to be universal, and not limited to Epie-Atissa alone. While in Epie-Atissa, Kalabari and Ibo, its use seems to be more restricted to the shrines, in Benin it is used beyond the shrines. It is used in connection with the dead, in offerings, life circle situations, and the cure of the sick and the detection of witchcraft.

### Camwood

Closely related to 'chalk', utiin, just discussed is 'camwood', atun, a hard, red West African wood of the botanical family of Pterocarpus tinctorius, which yields dye. Its symbolic importance in Epie-Atissa divinatory system was indicated by Mrs. Yoroboyegha Nwankoya, who is priestess of <sup>the</sup> Camwood deity called Selegidi, at Famgbe, who was interviewed on 24th September, 1985.

Recounting how she found the deity, Mrs. Nwankoya who is above 55 years old and a mother of two adults, said while paddling along the river to her farm several years ago, she saw a piece of wood 'swimming' towards her.<sup>35</sup> She stopped

out of curiosity and lifted the wood into the canoe. Just then, the canoe began to sink until people nearby heard her shout and came to her rescue. As she carried the wood home to her house, several people tried to cut the wood with their knives in order to find out what it was. But in time, all those people who did that had incurable sores all over their bodies. She too became very ill, but recovered only after finding out from the diviners that she was in possession of a deity called Selegidi. She therefore built for it a little 'shrine', ugula in which this piece of camwood is now kept and worshipped. All those who had sores on their bodies as a result of their trespass against Selegidi were later cured only after the proper sacrifices had been offered.

It was discovered soon afterwards that the camwood deity was a fecundity deity which gave Mrs. Nwankoya the ability to cause barren women to become fertile, and difficult cases of pregnancies and deliveries were safely handled. Thus, as already mentioned earlier, her home has now become a mini-maternity hospital (Plate 58, which shows Mrs. Yoroboyegha Nwankoya, priestess of camwood deity, Selegidi, seated and flanked by her two sons. The camwood itself is standing on the table; the 'shrine', ugula is still under construction. Plate 57 shows some of her numerous customers; some pregnant ones have been safely delivered, but others are still waiting for their turn).

Explaining how she is able to deal with difficult cases of pregnant women, she said the deity usually gives her advance information especially through esoteric knowledge about difficult cases of pregnancies and deliveries that ~~are~~

brought to her. And on their arrival, she is usually able to know by way of ugbolo, 'staff' divination, the cause or causes of the problem, and what to do in order to achieve immediate results, such as the type of sacrifice to be offered and herbs to be applied. Usually, a majority of these cases have to do with the influence of witchcraft, for which the recommended remedy may be the application of certain rituals of 'purification', pumu, which the pregnant woman undertakes. This may include the use of 'alligator pepper', Aframomum meleguata, some herbs, eggs, and palm-fronds, together with kaikai, 'palm-gin', in order to dispel the evil influence of witches and wizards on such pregnant women. Otherwise, the pregnancy may be lost, or the mother may die during delivery. In cases where the witches have decided that the woman must die in child birth, the situation could be averted by carving a miniature human-being with a plantain stub; so that it represents the woman. This is used in rubbing all over the woman's body, followed by a prayer in the shrine of the camwood deity thus: "if anyone had pinned this woman at the burial ground, and marked her for death, she is now replaced by this image. You may have this image but leave her alone". Once this is done, with the appropriate sacrifices, as recommended by the deity, the woman could then deliver safely.

She has been so successful that most of the difficult cases at the Government General Hospital, Yenagoa, that seem to cause embarrassment to the medical profession, are usually finally handled by her. This is usually done in desperation by the husbands and relatives who recognize that such are not medical cases but spiritual. She has thus been accorded recognition in obstetrics in Epie-Atissa because of her unfailing successes due to the influence of the camwood deity in her life for the past 30 years or more. But more specifically, in Epie-Atissa, 'Camwood'. atun is symbolically associated with fertility, therefore with rites of passage such as birth, circumcision and death.

### CONCLUSION

Cirlot has expressed the view that "all natural and cultural objects may be invested with a symbolic function which emphasizes their essential qualities in such a way that they lend themselves to spiritual interpretation."<sup>36</sup> Thus, a discussion on the ritual objects associated with Epie-Atissa culture inevitably presents symbolic elements because of the inherent social and psychological interpretations that prevail. Furthermore, the materials used for cultic and ritual purposes in Epie-Atissa do not only represent an objective reality but also express the subjective states of feeling among the people. It is this dimension that makes almost all the cultic materials used in divinatory rituals

indicated here, wholly symbolic.

But a study on the concept of symbolism in Epie-Atissa would not be restricted to just a few items. It would indeed include both the psychological and cosmological or the naturalistic dimensions. Whilst this is a task that might be taken up in the near future, in this chapter emphasis has been placed on the way in which the ritual objects, discussed in association with divination in Epie-Atissa, bring about the essential idea of order in the community.

In that respect, the aganaga, 'ladder' divinatory instrument, is the most symbolic instrument of consensus and order in Epie-Atissa. It is therefore the most undisturbed value or source of stability in the area. Hence the materials used in its construction are carefully selected and it is constructed according to set pattern, from which no deviation is permitted. Every material used has specific meaning, so nothing foreign is tolerated with its construction. Even the number of persons who bear it has its symbolic meaning. Also symbolic is the variation of aganaga, 'ladder', called ugbolo, 'staff' divination. This includes the material used, the purpose and meaning, and the number of persons who bear it (see above, Chapter 2, pp.93-94). Thus a better understanding of the aganaga as a major symbol of great importance to people in Epie-Atissa, and the cultural meanings attached to it, will no doubt serve as a means of "furthering understanding of the processes of social life"<sup>37</sup> in that culture. This is

because Victor Turner who has helped to popularize the study of symbols, made use of rites and symbols as his keys "to the understanding of social structure and social process".<sup>38</sup>

In Epie-Atissa therefore, the aganaga and ugbolo, are both symbols which are recognized and approved as community symbols. Their use is therefore restricted to community 'shrines', ugula only, which are presided over by community priests and their cultic personnel. Furthermore, they are also regarded as the approved and recognized mnemonics of their trade. Hence whenever the aganaga divination is undertaken, people are immediately reminded that someone has died, and inibudu, 'the ancestors' are being consulted to establish whether the person 'died well', ovie, or 'bad', odieli. This determines the kind of burial he receives. On the other hand, when the ugbolo divination takes place, the immediate connection is that somebody has either offended by way of trespass or is sick. As a result, the divinities, idiomu are being seriously implored to pardon and spare life. Thus, the aganaga, 'ladder', and ugbolo, 'staff', are "symbols which refer to both poles of existence: life and death, good and evil".<sup>39</sup> This is an ambivalence which is encountered in Epie-Atissa religious system from time to time. This is linked with the concept of malevolent forces in the area (see above, Chapter 4, pp.257-269). This seems therefore, to create a tension in which there is a constant pressure on the diviners to create a balance, hence some kind of order, which in turn, brings to focus a certain amount of "semiotic or symbolic patterning of thought or

meaning".<sup>40</sup>

Another ritual object associated with divination in Epie-Atissa, for which symbolic patterning could be discerned is in connection with the various types of azuzu, 'fan', earlier discussed (see at pp.394f.). As already indicated, it was originally made with palm-fronds and other vegetable materials for various domestic uses. The housewife used it to fan up the fire while cooking in the kitchen; others used it to drive away flies, insects and mosquitoes. The elderly used it to fan themselves in the tropical heat. Now it is used by elders and traditional rulers as a social symbol; the priests and priestesses use it as cultic symbol. As cultic symbol held especially by the male priests in the service of the communal 'divinities', idiomu, the azuzu which are locally made are no longer as popular as those imported from Kano, Northern Nigeria. These are made of leather and some are beautifully decorated with the feathers of various types of birds, such as ostrich, eagle, hawk and peacock feathers, and others with white horses' wool, and with flamboyant designs. The price is therefore expensive. The original type made of straw is still being used, but its use is restricted only to priests and priestesses of certain rank, and not by all. In this way, azuzu is a means by which the status symbol in the cultic hierarchy is emphasized.

The fact that cultic priests in Epie-Atissa prefer to purchase their azuzu, 'fans', from Kano, Northern Nigeria,

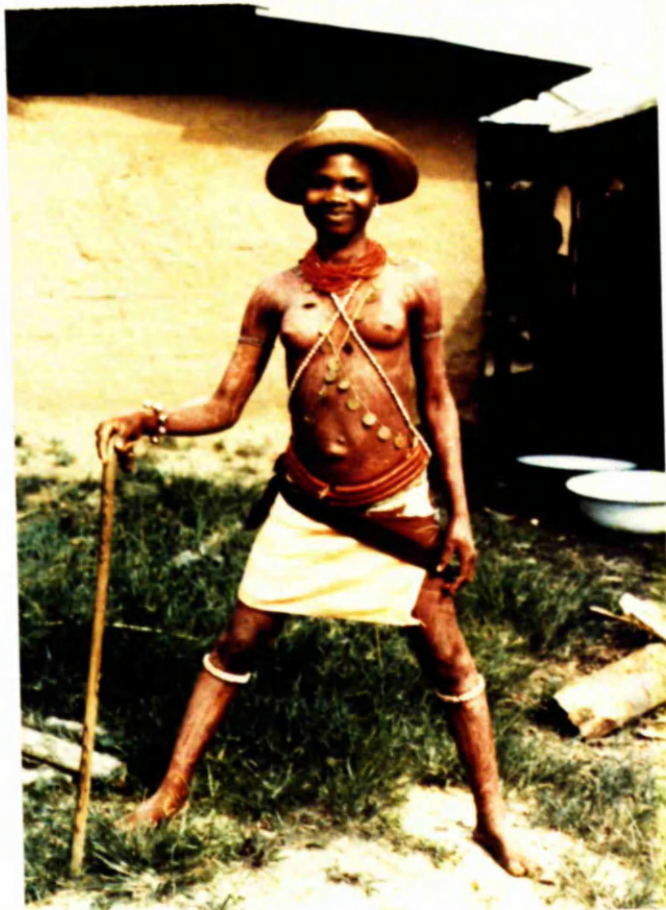


which are of better quality than the native straw type, is indicative of the tension that was created especially since the oil boom in Nigeria in the 1970s, during which people preferred foreign goods to the locally made ones. The foreign items were viewed as being superior in quality, therefore the cost was not a barrier. The higher the cost the better it was, in terms of prestige and status. But the cheaper the cost, the more inferior the quality, therefore degrading as status symbol. This point seems to be unconsciously emphasized by Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken in his dream in 1975. Thus, the local significance of these 'fans', azuzu, is not diminished but is rather enhanced because of the additional meanings attached to the feathers of 'eagle', ugo and 'hawk', okpokpo, as being indicative of chivalry and victory, both being birds of prey. The birds themselves are symbolic of aggression. The ostrich feathers are symbolic of death (see at p.400); and the horse's white mane symbolizes divinity and its swiftness in action. The fan itself is symbolic of the power inherent in diviners, in their ability to ward off evil influences such as witchcraft, death, sickness, barrenness and other calamities.

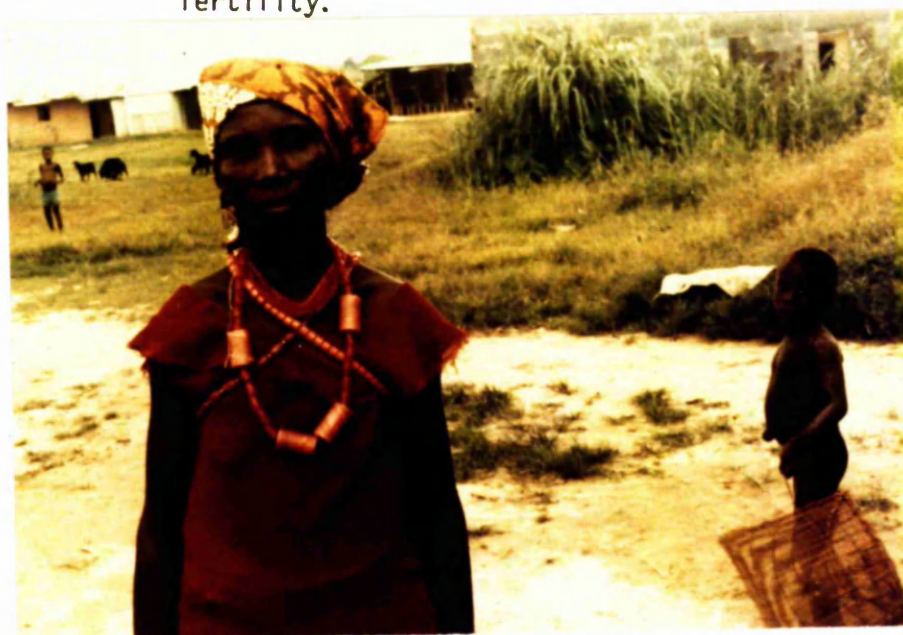
The third aspect associated with divination in Epie-Atissa which has symbolic connotations is with regard to the use of colour. Like other communities in the Niger Delta and West Africa in general, the constant natural vegetation around which they live makes people in Epie-Atissa to be very conscious of colours, such as, "black, red, white, yellow,

blue, green, brown, pink, orange and grey".<sup>41</sup> As a result, Robert Serpell has indicated that Nigerian children have a "far greater prevalence of colour dominance among them than among American children of the same age."<sup>42</sup> This is because for most people in Nigeria, including Epie-Atissa, and especially among the unschooled, "colour is the most important basis for describing and identifying an object".<sup>43</sup> Then they are able to give more meaningful functional association with the item.<sup>44</sup> Thus, E.W. Ardener has indicated that the Ibos in the Eastern parts of Nigeria are sensitive to colour especially with regard to skin pigmentation which "ranges from very dark through paler, yellowish or sometimes reddish bronze shades to albinism".<sup>45</sup> And like the coloured populations in the West Indies, and also in the United States of America, "the yellowish or reddish complexions are considered more beautiful than the darker complexions".<sup>46</sup>

In Epie-Atissa however, ideas about colour symbolism seem to be more obviously restricted to cultic and divinatory matters. Even then, the most prevalent colours used seem to be further restricted to only red and white, as indicated in the cultic and divinatory uses of 'chalk', utiin, and 'camwood', atun, including 'red cap', eweh yere yere, and 'real coral beads', ila yereyere. According to Epie-Atissa divinatory concepts, the cultic personnel of any particular deity at either Akaba or Famgbe, for example, are identified from non-cultic members by the ritual adorning of white chalk marks around their 'right eyes', known as poko adu,



**PLATE 72** - The picture shows a teenage girl from the village of Ikolo just circumcised. Note the emphasis placed on 'camwood dye', atun, used all over her body, and the red beads on the neck and waist, indicative of life and fertility.



**PLATE 73** - By contrast, the big, 'red coral beads', ila yereyere, on the neck of this woman is indicative of death. It shows that she is the chief mourner and the closest person to the departed soul, probably her mother, she comes from the village of Swali.

and vertically up and down 'the right arm', known as, lala ogbo (see details above, at Chapter 4. pp.163-164). The white chalk used in this way indicates power, strength and might, and it is symbolic of the declaration of war, as against peace. Its use in this manner is restricted only to men; women are prohibited. The use of white in cultic matters in Epie-Atissa therefore symbolizes purity, sanctity and hence the divinity served, and his omnipotence.

Red is used more by women in the context of the 'camwood', atun, which represents blood, therefore life and fecundity. As a result, it is restricted only to women who are still within the child-bearing age. Hence barren and older women may not be dressed with camwood. However, when the red coral beads are worn on the neck by a lady, it is symbolic of death, and that the person wearing it is the chief mourner. It is a sign that life has departed from the bosom of that person. Again, this is restricted to women only. But both men and women of high priestly rank in the cultic hierarchy may put on a red cap as symbol of cultic authority. (See Plates 72 and 73; the Camwood dye, atun and the red beads on the circumcised teenage girl indicate life and fertility; but the Coral beads on the woman indicate death. She is the chief mourner.)

Thus in Epie-Atissa divinatory system, ideas about symbols tend to follow along the pattern of binarity or ambivalence. That is, the symbols occur in pairs, in terms of life and death; peace and war; male and female; red and white;

good and evil; local and foreign; inferior and superior; barren and fecundity; cultic and non-cultic, etc. This is probably why there is constant tension in the designated area; hence the constant need for order. This is largely accountable for the reasons why the practice of divination is sustained and flourishes in the area. It also explains why almost everything that happens in the area is interpreted in terms of cause and effect. Thus, everything is symbolic and meaningful, to the extent that ritual objects such as the 'bell', igbeme, 'the horn', egbelegbele, and the 'drum', eze-som, and especially the colours, all acquire "mystical significance".<sup>46</sup> This is also the case with 'calabash', egbele, which is ordinarily used in serving tombo, 'palm-wine', but used among the Yoruba Ifa priests as receptacle for odu materials during Ifa initiation ceremonies. Perhaps this mystical dimension in connection with divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa is intended to link "the physical with the metaphysical worlds",<sup>47</sup> or "reconcile the psychic with the spatial levels of reality".<sup>48</sup>

## CHAPTER 7

### FOOTNOTES

1. J.R. Hinnells (ed.), Dictionary of Religions (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books Ltd., 1984), p.2831.
2. Ibid., p.284.
3. Idem.
4. Victor Turner, Ndembu Divination, op.cit, p.1.
5. G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.9.
6. cf. J.E. Cirlot, op. cit., p.108. According to E.A.Wallis Budge, The Mummy, A Handbook of Egyptian Funerary Archaeology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p.21, "the neolithic Egyptians worshipped many gods, perhaps totems, and various animals, and each district had its own god and sacred animals." Thus the totemistic insignia was probably displayed in the form of a flag as a social or national symbol.
7. J.E. Cirlot, op. cit. p.108.
8. Idem.
9. cf. Manfred Lurker, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1980). p.129.
10. cf. Alison Hodge, Nigeria's Traditional Crafts, op. cit., p.21.
11. Wilfrid D. Hambly, Cultural Areas of Nigeria Chicago, 1935), p.469.
12. cf. E.A. Wallis Budge, The Mummy, op. cit., p.258.
13. Ibid., p.388.
14. For details on the various kinds of leatherwork in Nigeria, and their economic importance, see Alison Hodge, 'Leatherwork', in Nigeria's Traditional Crafts, op. cit., pp.44-48.
15. Although there is no direct evidence in support of the mystical aspect of azuzu in Epie-Atissa, among the Ifa diviners, the fan is regarded as a symbol of terror, which could be used to set all opposing forces to flight. For details, see E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa, op. cit., p.54. This is similar to the view held by most people in

Epie-Atissa, especially those who have strong belief in the powers inherent in diviners.

16. cf. Alison Hodge, op. cit., p.15.
17. Idem; also note the details of the way it is planted and the required temperature that is best for its growth.
18. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, op. cit., p.110.
19. E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba, op. cit., p.88.
20. Idem.
21. cf. Alison Hodge, Nigeria's Traditional Crafts, op. cit., p.17.
22. Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, op. cit., p.121.
23. See Evan M. Zuesse, Ritual Cosmos, The Sanctification of Life in African Religions, (Athens) Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), p.185, for details.
24. Idem. Also see, Grace Harris, 'Possession Hysteria' in a Kenya Tribe', American Anthropology (1957), 59, pp.1046-1066, which expresses similar ideas.
25. K.A. Busia 'The Ashanti' in Daryll Forde (ed.), African Words, Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples (Oxford: (1976), p.202.
26. Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols, Aspect of Ndembu Ritual (London: Cornell University Press, (1967), p.14.
27. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.70.
28. P.A. Talbot, Life in Southern Nigeria, The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe (London: Frank Cases and Co. Ltd., 1967), p.15; cf. Robin Horton, The God's As Guests, op.cit, p.28.
29. See at G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., p.44.
30. R.E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom, p.51.
31. Ibid., p.153.
32. Ibid., pp.163-64
33. Francis A. Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, op. cit., p.76.
34. Ibid., p.109.

35. It will be recalled similar stories of things 'swimming' towards women during their early years of ritual calling have been mentioned (see from pp.357f., in connection with female priests and their ritual callings). Perhaps a few specific examples will suffice. For instance, Mrs. Nimbaraye Abasi, Priestess of Orueperemo, indicated that a 'spoon', igasi, 'swam' towards her, until it 'jumped' from the water into her canoe (see at p.361). And Mrs. Janet Adibagha, Priestess of Odumbirigbiri sometimes saw a 'walking-stick', ugbolo 'swim' towards her (see at p.363), etc.
36. J.E. Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols, op. cit., p.25.
37. cf. Raymond Firth, Symbols, op. cit., p.25.
38. Idem. Also see Victor Turner, Ndembu Divination, Its Symbolism and Techniques, op. cit., p.6ff; where he lays stress on the meanings of 28 divinatory symbols in Ndembu. Also the Forest of Symbols (1967), pp. 48-58.
39. Manfred Lurker, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt, op. cit., p.9.
40. cf. Renaat Devisch, 'Perspectives on Divination in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa', op. cit., p.68.
41. See Roger Weslett, 'Bini Color Terms', in Anthropological Linguistics (Bloomington, Indiana: 1970), 12, 9, pp.349-360.
42. Robert Serpell, 'Cultural Differences in Attentional Preference for Colour over Form', International Journal of Psychology (1969), 4, 1, pp.1-8.
43. Judith L. Evans and Marshall H. Segall, 'Learning to Classify by Color and Function: A Study of Concept and Discovery of Ganda Children', Journal of Social Psychology (1969), 77, pp.35-53.
44. cf. C.R. Brian and F.L. Goodenough, 'The Relative Potency of Color and Form Perception at various ages', Journal of Experimental Psychology (1929), 12, pp. 197-213; N.L. Corah, 'Color and Form in Children's Perceptual Behaviour', Perception and Motor Skills (1964), 18, pp.313-316; B. Inhelder and J. Piaget, The Early Growth of Logic in the Child (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964); R.G. Suchmann, 'Cultural Difference in Children's Color and Form Preferences', Journal of Social Psychology (1986), 70, pp.3-10; R.G. Suchmann and T. Trabasso, 'Color and Form Preference in Young Children', Experimental Child Psychology, (1986), 3, pp.177-187.
45. See E.W. Ardener, 'Some Ibo Attitudes to Skin Pigmentation', Man (1954), 54, 101, pp.71-73.
46. For details concerning the mystical significance of colours, see Arthur Leib, 'The Mystical Significance of



Colours in the Life of the Natives of Madagascar',  
Collectanea, (London: William Glaisher Ltd., 1947), 57,  
pp.128-133.'

47. cf. J.E. Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols, op. cit.,  
p.xvi.

48. Ibid., p.li.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### Typology of Praxis

In this study, seven ways in which divination is practised in Epie-Atissa have been presented. They fulfil different functions so they are grouped into two specific groups. Only one of the seven belongs in a separate category, and that is the aganaga divination. This is used specifically for the purpose of communicating with the dead or the ancestors, inibudu and it is superintended by the chief priest of the ancestral deity called Utoken. It controls the way in which people are buried. If he or she 'died well', (uwu-vie), he is buried in the 'good bush', (azi-ovie), among those who died well. But if he died of 'witchcraft', ida, then he is buried in the 'bad-bush', (azi-odieli), among those who had died of similar circumstances.

It could then be seen that the concept of symbolic patterning in Epie-Atissa which as was mentioned in the previous chapter, which occurs in clusters of two, continues in life as in death. Thus, there are two burial grounds, and the criteria for being buried in one and not in the other, depends on what the aganaga diviners say during the post-mortem divinatory exercise. As a result, the tension

and grief that are created by the death of a loved one, are even further intensified by the uncertainty of the result of the aganaga diviners. It is for the purpose of diffusing this tension that individuals in certain families deliberately stand against any aganaga divination for their deceased. Those who do so are only those with strong Christian persuasions. Otherwise, it is the norm to do so. Here again, the binarity between 'good', ovie and 'bad', odieli, which constitutes Epie-Atissa concept of symbolic patterning, seems to be very highly emphasized.

The aganaga as an instrument of post-mortem divination, is separated from all other functions, particularly those with reference to crisis-related problems. This gave rise to the construction of its variation, the ugbolo, 'staff' divination. The main difference is that one is a ladder borne by four cultic experts, while the other is a staff borne by two, and in extreme cases by one. In the last case, it is usually borne by the priest alone.

But the significant point is that both divinatory instruments, aganaga and ugbolo, are used for the benefit of the entire community, therefore they are linked to the major community 'deities', idionu, and operate from their 'shrines', ugula. This helps to ensure that things are done according to established procedure handed down from the ancestors generally regarded as the traditional or customary ways, hence the norm. Innovations are therefore difficult because there are too many taboos. As a result, nothing is

done without first seeking divine approval. Examples of how this operates have been seen in some of the main centres such as, the shrines of Orisa at Akaba, and of Aruku-eken at Famgbe, etc. In all these places, emphasis is placed on male functionaries. Women may however operate privately and on their own as mediums of their personal deities, such as the Oloko, 'law' divination at Ikolo; idiama, 'looking glass' divination at Ogu, and igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination at Kpansia. Men may also operate on their own without any attachment to the community deities, as in the case of Epie-'Bottle', ololo divination at Kpansia. In all these cases, the instruments mentioned also indicate the method of divination.

#### **THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF DIVINATION IN AFRICA**

The practice of divination is a phenomenon that is common in most parts of Africa. Some prevailing theories on the phenomenology of divination in Africa, notable among whom are M. Zuesse<sup>1</sup> and Renaat Devisch,<sup>2</sup> have categorized divination into three main types: namely, possession, intuitive and wisdom types of divination.

### Possession Divination

According to Zuesse, persons possessed are used by entities, such as gods and spirits as their mediums. These divinities do so by ensuring that the will of those to be so used is "temporarily annihilated",<sup>3</sup> following which the persons accept to do the will of the divinity without question. Those who resist are forced into submission by afflicting them with serious calamities and sickness. Then upon submission, they are bestowed with certain extra-human abilities which they exhibit during divination. Devisch called this mediumistic divination because they communicate with their deities who give them revelation knowledge concerning the secrets for which clients have visited. Such knowledge may pertain to the diviner's ability to interpret certain divinatory symbols, such as bones, nuts, shells, etc., which are used as vehicles that guide the diviner's intuition or perception. Again, Devisch refers to this as interpretative, deciphering divination,<sup>4</sup> because both types are dependent on possession by an entity to be able to operate. Hence according to Retel-Laurentin, mediumistic divination affects the soul, such that the person who has become a medium receives therapy as soon as every resistance is broken.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the point is being made that mediumistic divination is therapeutic, and it also causes the individual to think he has a sense of mission, hence privileged and important. Divinities are not restricted to possessing humans alone. They also possess birds, such as eagles, which become omen birds, or animals regarded as

sacred, or even objects.<sup>6</sup>

In possession divination, therefore, there are many aspects. First, possession could be mediumistic because the diviner becomes a channel through which a particular deity or deities operate. Second, possession divination could be interpretative and deciphering because of the use of certain divinatory symbols. Hence divination connected with the interrogation of the spirit of the dead, and of omens and dreams, may belong in this category. Thirdly, <sup>have in</sup>possession <sup>when</sup>trance, which is regarded as the most common type, <sup>no</sup>because the <sup>vib</sup>diviner acts out the message of the possession spirit. Finally, <sup>has is</sup>shamanistic, or visionary divination <sup>when</sup>because <sup>no</sup>emphasis is placed on visions when possessed, as in some <sup>vib</sup>churches where the prophet healer holds sway.<sup>7</sup>

From the field work just conducted in Epie-Atissa, in the Niger Delta, it seems obvious that all the four aspects of spirit possession discussed prevail in the area among both male and female diviners. It has indeed been discovered that almost all the diviners in Epie-Atissa experienced possession which occurred in varying degrees. For some, it began with sickness which was protracted, and for which there was no cure. They were afflicted with sickness by 'deity', (idiomu) as indication of the call to become mediums. The married persons who continued to resist lost their children and life became very unbearable. In the circumstances, members of the immediate family looked for solutions through the diviners, all of whom confirmed that

'deity', idiomu was responsible. At this point, the word 'deity', or idiomu is used in the general sense; but once the curiosity has been aroused they would be interested to find out more specifically, the particular 'deity' or idiomu. This having been ascertained, the only remedy was to acquiesce, perform the necessary rites and sacrifices to the particular idiomu, and become a medium. This was what all did in the long run; and having done so, the acceptance of the call indeed became a mechanism of healing.

After this, the next stage of actual possession by the deity was during the initiation ceremony. At this time, most of them said they experienced strange feelings of possession by an overwhelming force when the devotees and other worshippers began to sing and dance to the accompaniment of the drums that were beaten. For example, Mr. Japan Anyasara, (see above, at Chapter 6, pp.349-351), fell down unconscious for hours and later danced, sang and prophesied, without being aware of what he was doing. A similar view was also expressed by Mrs. Janet Adibagha, priestess of Odumgbirigbiri, at Ogu, who also said hers was a big python which she encountered during the initiation ceremony which took the form of 'baptism' in the water near a sand bank. The significant point here is that this could be regarded as 'mystical' examples of possession, which according to I.M.Lewis, has its root in mysticism.<sup>8</sup> Omar Khayyam Moore therefore links divination with magic, and by extension the occult, because of the feeling that effects are controlled by spirits which influence the course of events.<sup>9</sup>

With particular reference to the theme of possession, Simeon Tinbiri, chief priest of Aruku-egene and Orisa at Akaba, danced, jumped frantically and prophesied when he was possessed. His whole appearance changed; his eyes became red in colour, and the expressions on his face and personality became frightful. Mrs. Better Wilson, priestess of alaboingeribo, who is responsible for igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination, speaks in a variety of unlearned tongues, and even tears into pieces any currency notes in her possession (see at Chapter 3, pp.208f.). The husbands of Janet Adibagha and Better Wilson are required to perform the ceremony called, eke kpen edu, meaning 'laps payment ceremony' (see details at Chapter 6, pp.372-374). Even after the ceremony has been performed, these women must sleep alone away from their husbands twice a week, on every 'heathen's Sabbath day', called ede-wiye-deke, and on every Saturday. The divinities go on those days to have affairs with these women, during which esoteric knowledge and mystical instructions are given. They sleep alone, away from their husbands, in their 'shrines', ugula, during these days.

The final stage of possession is therefore that of illumination, during which the mediums seem to receive answers supernaturally concerning the problems of their clients. The stage before this is described by the Epie word, mu, meaning 'captured', 'held', which denotes the moment of total surrender following the initial resistance.



In Epie-Atissa therefore, the various divinatory practices which come under different categories of possession, include: firstly, the aganaga 'ladder' divination, and its variation, ugbolo, 'staff' divination. Both of these relate to inibudu, 'ancestors', Utoken 'the land deity', and the entire community. They are both mediumistic and interpretative. The Epie-Bottle divination is also mediumistic and interpretative because the diviners interpret a variety of signs under an influence. The same could be said of agba, mortar and oloko divinations at Ikolo.

However, the 'igilasi', 'drinking glass' divination practised by Better Wilson at Kpansia falls into the category of possession trance, because holding up the little glass of kaikai, locally brewed 'palm gin' in her hand, she goes into a trance-like state before finally informing the client about the findings.<sup>10</sup> The shamanistic aspects seem restricted to occurrences in the 'prayer houses', ufamu-ebбели, as earlier indicated (see Chapter 4, pp.263-266).

### Insight or Intuitive Divination

The insight or intuitive divination indicated by Zuesse<sup>11</sup> has been interpreted by Bourguignon "to include forms of heightened awareness, though people do not always attribute sacredness to them".<sup>12</sup> In this example, the diviner may not

necessarily be possessed but could by way of insight or intuition identify and solve client's problems, discover missing articles, thieves and witches. In addition to possible extrasensory awareness, he may exhibit a high degree of intelligence and knowledge of the socio-cultural conditions around him. It therefore has characteristics which are neither fully wisdom nor possession divination.

There are two types of divination in Epie-Atissa which fall within this group. The first one is idiama, 'looking glass' divination practised by Madam Zikumona at Ogu. As already mentioned (see at pp.201-208), she is about 85 years old, and totally blind in both eyes. She is priestess of a deity called Ekine, and was also once a strong member of the Anglican Church, who now divines with idiama, 'looking glass'. Since she is blind, it seems impossible for her to be able to look into the idiama in order to interpret whatever she saw. She therefore divines intuitively and with great insight. The other types are the aganaga and ugbolo, in which besides the bearers who may be possessed, the person or persons enquiring seem to do so intuitively and with insight, as was seen during the public divination seance of Ishmael Binadomu, who died practising witchcraft

### **Wisdom Divination**

In wisdom divination, the practitioner does not show signs of possession, but speaks as led by the Supreme God, known

in Epie-Atissa as Izibe, among the Yoruba as Olorun and the Ibo as Chuku.

The priests therefore claim a deeper esoteric form of spirituality, and their shrines are more highly regarded. As a result the priests are required to undergo more rigorous training before being initiated into office. One of the most remarkable cults in Nigeria that practice wisdom divination is the Ifa among the Yoruba where the priests begin their training between the ages of seven and twelve and the training lasts from ten to twelve years. This is necessary because the priests, known as babalawo are highly regarded after graduating as the "guardians, counsellors, philosophers and physicians of their various communities".<sup>13</sup> They are required to learn by heart during their training some 256<sup>sets of</sup> verses of Yoruba oral literature called odu in the Ifa divinatory corpus. Since this is difficult, "the trainees are aided by a medical preparation known as isoye, 'memory aid', which they take with their food three times a day",<sup>14</sup> so that they can memorize and reproduce the verses correctly. In the process, some complete the programme, but some do not but still "practice at home and perform divination".<sup>15</sup> And when faced with a client whose problems are too difficult to solve, an Ifa priest does not go to consult with any divinity, but he approaches his more learned colleagues. This helps to update his knowledge. He may even wish to specialize in one aspect of Ifa divination or the other, such as "healing, chanting of Ifa texts",<sup>16</sup>

etc., which may encourage him to travel widely in search of knowledge.

Other African examples of a category of wisdom divination are the Fa of Dahomey, the Arochuku shrine among the Ibo of Nigeria, and the mysterious Mwari shrines in Matopo Hills of Zimbabwe. A peculiar aspect of wisdom divination is that the "sages interpreted for the petitioners the word of God in accordance with their wisdom",<sup>17</sup> some of which may be comparable to the oracles in ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>18</sup>

It is however certain from the evidence gathered during this field work in Epie-Atissa that there is a complete absence of wisdom divination in the area. Perhaps it may be found in other parts of the Niger Delta, but that would require further investigation. But its absence in Epie-Atissa may be explained on the basis that Ifa cult is based on "a vast body of Yoruba Oral Tradition"<sup>19</sup> which has developed over an *extended period of time*. The situation in Epie-Atissa is quite different. Here the practice of divination is perhaps still comparatively young, as exemplified in Orisa shrine, which is still developing. Beside this cultural aspect, people in Epie-Atissa in general are still behind most parts of Nigeria educationally, economically and also in Christianity. For example, while Christianity and education arrived in the neighbouring Kalabari and Nembe areas in the 19th century, Epie-Atissa experienced the benefits about 100 years later, in the 20th century. Missionaries from Nembe, Brass introduced Bibles and hymns in Nembe language, which

lasted for a while.<sup>20</sup> Then Kolokuma speaking Ijo to the West also affected the area culturally and linguistically through trade. The Engenni to the North also had a similar influence on the people. Thus, for a while, people in Epie-Atissa seemed threatened to lose their identity. This problem of identity crisis is a situation which neither the Yoruba nor the Ibo has experienced. They have both therefore had periods of steady cultural development and revival, hence capable of building up various types of divinatory centres which the cultures have nurtured and allowed to spread, as in the case of Ifa. This may explain why several years ago, people in several parts of the Niger Delta, and people in Epie-Atissa in particular preferred then to patronize diviners in the Ibo heartland, and went to such oracles as "the Agbala of Awka, the Igwe-ka-ala near Owerri, and the Chukwu of Arochukwu".<sup>21</sup>

It is a well-known fact to people in Epie-Atissa community that their forefathers patronised the gods in Iboland. A similar view is also expressed by Robin Horton in reference to the Kalabari people whom he thinks also patronised these same shrines in the Ibo hinterland because the oracles "had the over-riding attraction of appearing foolproof and impartial because of their distance from home".<sup>22</sup> This has resulted in the collapse of the local funeral rite of Ikpataka Dogi among the Kalabari people. But by contrast, the aganaga 'ladder' divination in Epie-Atissa is just gathering momentum, and may never be abandoned. It is flourishing because it is rooted in 'ancestral', inibudu

reverence, a cultural perspective that may persist as long as the culture persists. But with reference to Epie-Atissa, Chief S.M. Ezekiel, the obeneken, 'village head' of Okaka during an interview on 9th January, 1985, explained a few details. First, he said there has never been a machinery in the area whereby anyone suspected of witchcraft could be tried, especially while the person was still alive. If so accused, it was necessary for the person to be given the opportunity to establish his or her innocence or guilt. It was the duty of the entire family to ensure that this was done. Secondly, the only places available then for such ordeals were in the Ibo land to which people inevitably went. They believed that the deities in those places were so effective that the name Izibe, 'God' was applied to them. Thus the ordeal of going to either Awka or Arochukwu was generally regarded as, 'ascending to God', funumi izibe wo.

It therefore took the form of pilgrimage to a holy place, so people did it dutifully and voluntarily. This definitely led to some difficulties because some whom people knew were innocent failed to return, and were regarded as having been lost in 'God', Izibe. They were therefore declared as having practised witchcraft, hence guilty. But it later came to light that some of the pretty young ladies who were still of child bearing age were captured and given to the young priests and other devotees as wives. The older women were either killed or allowed to return. Thus it is suspected that several families in Epie-Atissa lost several members of their families that way in the Ibo area.

Now, however, the trend is gradually changing to a period of possible cultural revival in Epie-Atissa, because people are now coming from various parts of Nigeria, including the Ibo and Yoruba areas to Orisa shrine at Akaba in similar ways. The reasons for which they come cover almost every aspect of human problems. For the men, these extend from the need for protection and prosperity, to examination success; killing of one's enemies, promotion at the place of work, recovery of stolen properties; financial prosperity to enable them to complete their buildings, etc. But for the women, problems include barrenness, healing, sleeplessness and bad dreams, query about Orisa's work, to finding lost property, etc. Thus, the village of Akaba is gradually developing into a wisdom type of divinatory centre in the Niger Delta. This could become a reality especially if, like the Ifa, some of the statements which are made and repeated ritualistically at Orisa shrine during divinatory practices are put together to constitute an Orisa literary corpus, and the priests trained over a period of time for the purpose. But it does not have to be patterned after Ifa; that being Yoruba. Therefore it is hoped something unique and original, portraying Epie-Atissa culture may develop in the course of time along the lines of wisdom divination at Akaba.

#### **THE FUNCTIONS OF DIVINATION**

Divination performs certain functions in society and it is

necessary to see how these fit together. Under a functionalist approach, there are six functions that will be considered.

The first is in connection with mediumistic divination which provides an opportunity for the healing of the medium, who like a mental patient, begins his career as diviner. This therefore does not only provide an avenue for the patient to be healed, but it also affords him the opportunity to perform a useful function in society. In other words, this theory suggests that it is therapeutic to become a mediumistic diviner, because "many diviners begin their career during mental illness".<sup>23</sup> The fact that almost all the mediumistic diviners in Epie-Atissa suffered serious misfortunes or illnesses prior to their initiation has already been indicated. Things became normal and stabilized as soon as they acquiesced. But this is not the same as saying that they began their career during mental illness. Nonetheless, the illness was simply indicative of that call. As 'pressures', a word known in Epie-Atissa as ababaa, meaning, 'endless problems' began to mount, the desire for survival caused them inevitably to submit.

A second aspect of the functional theory suggests that diviners are mainly drawn from those who are inferior in social status. This applies mostly to women. It is not certain, however, if this could be so generalized. But it has been reported that among the Ga people of south eastern Ghana:



Mediumship represents the most powerful and one of the most prestigious occupations open to women. Through mediumship, capable and ambitious Ga women are enabled to resolve certain psycho-social ambivalences arising from their inferior biosocial and socio-economic status and to achieve prestige and influence in contemporary Ga society.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that mediums want prestige may apply to some extent, to some of the female diviners in Epie-Atissa as well. People want to occupy positions of power and influence; very few would refuse because all want to succeed. But with particular reference to women in Epie-Atissa, several who are now mediums especially at Ogu, had some education. A majority of them were members of the Anglican Church; all were married and had children. For example, of the 10 women interviewed at Ogu on 14th September, 1985, who are practising mediums, 7 were baptized members of the Anglican church; 2 were leaders of the women's association; and 3 had completed elementary education. Hence according to the level of literacy at Ogu and Epie-Atissa in general, they were not the lowest of women in the society at all. Some of their husbands were well to do; some were even schoolmasters.

In the case of the men, Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-egene at Famgbe, is also somehow educated, and was training to become a Catholic priest. Japan Anyasara, the cultic secretary of Orisa at Akaba also has some education, and works for the Rivers State Government. Both Simeon

Tinbiri and Orderly Torotein, chief priests of Orisa and Utoken respectively were once members of the Anglican church at Akaba that has since folded up. Orioko Dangolo of Kpansia did not have a formal education but reads, writes and speaks intelligently. Again these men did not come from inferior backgrounds in Epie-Atissa society.

Also noteworthy in this connection is the fact that none of them said they chose to become mediums voluntarily in order to gain prestige. This is because people in such occupations have never actually been held in high regard in the community. As a result, most people actually go to them as the last resort, and even then, secretly. Again, the fact that almost all of them, both men and women, fought seriously against a career of divination initially, was indicative of the fact that they had no choice. One reason is that there are no hereditary priests in Epie-Atissa. Hence the concept of people becoming mediums from inferior social status may not strictly apply either to women or men in Epie-Atissa, even though that may be the case in other cultures.

The third function of divination is the cathartic function, by means of which society is purged.<sup>25</sup> This is definitely the case in Epie-Atissa because although it is governed according to the civil law, in the rural areas the native law and custom still predominate. Thus people obey the taboos strictly, for fear of the consequences. The cathartic function of divination arises from the fact that only the

diviners can deal adequately with offences committed against 'the land', Utoken, hence against the 'ancestors', inibudu.

Fourthly, that divination generates consensus. This is because difficult decisions affecting societal norms and values have their final appeal at the diviners. Thus when the diviners in Epie-Atissa declare the dead person to have been a witch, after having undergone both private and public divination seances, especially by means of aganaga, 'ladder' divination, the corpse ends in the bad bush where the wicked dead are buried. It is generally accepted that civil law cannot reverse this decision. In this way, divination helps to legitimize decisions.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, two women, both diviners, namely, Mrs. Zikumona Tinbiri, priestess of Oloko divination at Ikolo, and Mrs. Yoroboyegha Nwankoya, priestess of Camwood Deity, at Famgbe, both indicated they were taken to court by certain individuals in the community for pronouncing their dead relatives as witches. Noteworthy is the fact that these are individual diviners, not communal. As a result, they were fined and threatened with imprisonment. But that does not change that which is already a cultural practice.

Fifthly, it has been emphasized by J. Middleton that divination performs an obstetric function. In other words, it is his view that mediums perform midwifery functions. Divination therefore performs a medical function.<sup>27</sup> The fact that this is actually the case in

Epie-Atissa has already been discussed in connection with Mrs. Yoroboyegha Nwankoya, priestess of Camwood deity called Selegidi at Fangbe (see above, Chapter 6, pp.374-376). It has been clearly indicated that her main divinatory assignment is in the area of midwifery, to the extent that some difficult cases of pregnancies and deliveries that may cause concern to members of the medical profession are safely and successfully handled by her. It was also stated that she has been practising for about 30 years or more, and has thus established her own mini-maternity home.

The area of medical anthropology has been highly emphasized and discussed in modern medical practice of which obstetrics has generated much interest. J.W. Williams has described obstetrics as an art based upon scientific foundations and having a practical application. He thinks obstetrics is a "craft, an invention, generally thought rests on intuitive and pragmatic bases".<sup>28</sup> It suggests the absence of mechanical procedures or logically determined actions. As an art, its principal events cannot be known or predicted with certainty. It therefore provides "justification for uncertainty, judgment and occasional failure".<sup>29</sup> But as science, obstetrics provides an avenue for rationality and action. This makes it necessary for the pregnant mother to be kept under close supervision in a clinic or maternity centre in order to avoid sudden pathological complications that may arise, and hence threaten the lives of both mother and child. But the provision of both pre-natal care or the availability of women's clinics and hospitals, with proper

medical equipment, manned by well trained midwives, nurses and medical practitioners, especially in Epie-Atissa and other parts of the Niger Delta, is slight. Furthermore, a good education of the general public in pre-natal matters for those in remote areas, is also problematic. All these may account for the successes of Mrs. Yoroboyegha Nwankoya's midwifery programme. Another medium who performs the divinatory functions of midwifery and massage since 1978, is Dimuna Abasi, priestess of Omugo at Ogu. But a lady called Onyema at Akaba had her gift tampered with by witchcraft, and all the children she tried to deliver usually died during childbirth. It was finally discovered by means of aganaga divination that Ishmael Binadomu who died from practising witchcraft, on 25 July, 1985, was responsible. This shows the way in which it is thought that malevolent forces can affect obstetric cases both under medical care and also in the hands of mediums in Epie-Atissa.

In all this however, divination also performs another major function, that of the catalyst in Epie-Atissa society. By definition, a catalyst is a substance, any thing or person that facilitates a change without it or him also undergoing a change. It seems obvious that aganaga divination in particular performs the role of catalysts in Epie-Atissa, especially while under the control of Utoken, 'the Earth goddess', because the norms and the praxis do not change, and may never change. This is in spite of the arrival of Christianity, education and other changes that occur in people's moral thinking and philosophy. These changes in

society may never affect the institution of divination in Epie-Atissa, because this research has clearly indicated that divinatory practices constitute some of the most important religious beliefs which have continued to unify the people in the area. The concept of divinatory seance in Epie-Atissa is better appreciated in the meanings of the words, pulu-aganaga, and isini-tonmu. Here isini-tonmu which translates for 'truth', contrasts with ikpe, 'false', in the same binary way as ovie, 'good', and odieli, 'bad' or 'evil'. It is isini-tonmu, 'truth' in Epie-Atissa to 'divine', pulu-aganaga, and 'falsehood', ikpe, not to pulu-aganaga especially once someone dies. It is also isini-tonmu, 'truth', to ensure that materials with which the aganaga frame is constructed remain standard. Rituals are therefore built around these concepts, as exemplified in the lala ogbo and isini-mu rituals, both of which are regarded as 'solidarity and agreement' rituals (see above, Chapter 2, pp.172-173).

Thus, as indicated by Geoffrey Hurd, "a common language; common customs; a common religion; all provide some attachment to the group, however vague. Religion is often the most effective of these. Great rituals and religious festivals have an important unifying effect."<sup>30</sup> It is in the respect of maintaining unity that divination performs the function of the catalyst. This is more so especially as it relates to inibudu, 'ancestors'. According to Keesing, "ancestors, spirits, or gods reinforce rules and give validity and meaning to human acts".<sup>31</sup> Thus in Epie-Atissa,

religious ideas such as divinatory practices may not only be revolutionary, but they are also among the sources of conservative tendencies. Hence great emphasis is placed on onyobu, with particular reference to 'the male priests', who are assigned to the services of the communal deities, and therefore viewed in society as the custodians of the people's religious beliefs. It seems obvious that religious beliefs in Epie-Atissa will be meaningless without divinatory practices.

Finally, E. Bourguignon and P. Rigby think divination can lead to legitimate innovation<sup>32</sup>. This could happen especially if divination upholds cultural values which clash with current beliefs, norm and values. This could create a situation whereby an innovative, charismatic individual may emerge in order to uphold the more traditional values they enjoy.

There is no doubt that this is already happening in Epie-Atissa because the diviners, in their priestly positions, are already recognized both by the community and the government. Those who operate privately seek government recognition by having their practice licensed by the government. This seems understandable because, according to William Hunter, Nigeria, as a country, has become so secular that the various governments have accorded recognition to traditional beliefs as they have to Christianity and Islam.<sup>33</sup> They could therefore not challenge the government but Christianity, since Islam has no base whatsoever in

Epie-Atissa. The obvious charismatic figure who is emerging in the area as the leader of the members of Epie-Atissa 'Deities Cult', Agbila Idiomu or Ogbo gbani Idiomu is Harvest Izonfatei, chief priest of Aruku-eken at Famgbe. He is young, full of zeal, and his earlier Catholic background and training, have caused him to be highly respected among his colleagues. This is even more so because of two other important reasons. First, as chief priest of Aruku-eken, a warlike deity, others who serve lesser deities fear and respect him. Second, he comes from Famgbe, the first village known historically to have settled on the Atissa creek.<sup>34</sup> He is therefore very bold and brave.

The main target of Harvest Izonfatei's attack in Epie-Atissa is therefore against the Anglican church, which is the main church in the area. It was obvious during the field-work that Christianity with particular reference to the missionary efforts of the Anglican Church, is losing its hold on the people at a very fast rate. Things are worse in the Atissa clan because of the twelve villages that constitute this clan, only Yenagoa still feels the presence of the Anglican church and other Pentecostal churches. This is because Yenagoa enjoys the privilege of headquarters. Elsewhere, the church has virtually died in places like Akaba, Obogoro, Ogu, Famgbe, Swali and other places, where almost all the inhabitants worship these numerous divinities. This is mainly because Harvest Izonfatei and his devotees hold regular open air campaigns from village to village for new converts, even on Sundays, without any



challenge from Church authorities.

Thus, the structural-functionalist approaches see the role of divination as helping to distribute power within the group, and to ensure that social order, tradition and convention are expressed and maintained. In other words, these approaches are concerned with 'value consensus',<sup>35</sup> and from the available data, it seems appropriate to agree that divination preserves and mobilizes the communal values of the people in Epie-Atissa. It has earlier been mentioned that divination also performs a psychological function and also a cybernetic function (see above, pp./36,184).

#### **OTHER THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF DIVINATION**

There are also other theoretical approaches to the study of divination, apart from the functionalist approach which need to be considered as well. This is because they have all affected this particular study in various ways. The first of these is the external, cognitive approach.

The cognitive approach sees divination as an epistemological system in which emphasis is placed on the need to know about a number of things: namely, why people go to diviners, how diviners operate, conditions governing divinatory practices in various cultural contexts, and other aspects. Thus cognitive anthropologists lay emphasis on the importance of ethnography, whereby data are collected, analyzed and

interpreted, with reference to observable behaviours. To some extent, this study of divination conducted in Epie-Atissa, in the Niger Delta, may fall within the scope of cognitive approach, hence similar to that of Robin Horton who presented his cognitive theory on divination.<sup>36</sup>

This particular study could be favourably compared and contrasted with related works previously done in other parts of the Niger Delta by Robin Horton and G.O.M. Tasie, both of whom did theirs in <sup>the</sup> Kalabari area,<sup>37</sup> and also with that of E.J. Alagoa, in connection with the Western Apoi,<sup>38</sup> who are people of Ijo extraction, but have since become Yoruba speaking in Ondo state of Nigeria. It is likely that this could be a basis upon which a unified body of knowledge about divination in the Niger Delta could be produced. Such a study would be of great value. But it would be improper to interpret divinatory practices that are of great cultural and traditional value to people in Epie-Atissa and other parts of the Niger Delta on the basis of Western positivistic, scientific presuppositions.<sup>39</sup> The danger is that it could lead to prejudices that might predispose the person involved to distort those facts that might have been carefully observed.<sup>40</sup>

Another problem or weakness here is that theoretical assumptions on divination which are strictly dependent on the external, cognitive approaches are likely to be faulty because knowledge gained through observation only, hence external, is not the same as knowledge gained from within,

which is internal. Commenting about this problem in his work among the Trobriands, Malinowski indicated: "My experience is that direct questioning of the native about a custom or belief never discloses their attitude of mind"...<sup>41</sup> This is because Malinowski was probably regarded by the Trobriands as an outsider, hence a stranger coming to spy on them. This writer, in spite of being native of Epie-Atissa also received similar treatments from the people during the field-work. This may point to one of the defects in cognitive study that mere observations may not necessarily disclose everything about a particular culture.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, diviners have been criticised that they are irrational because their deeds fail to conform to objective logic,<sup>43</sup> and "that their oracles tell them nothing",<sup>44</sup> as mentioned by Robin Horton. The fact still remains that diviners and divination as an institutionalized practice in Epie-Atissa, are not after logic but survival, so to them, their oracles tell them something.

The second theoretical approaches are the internal, semiotic and semantic approaches, which have to do with the interpretation of symbols associated with the practice of divination. The importance of symbols in divination cannot be over-emphasized. It is the way by which meanings are attached to some of the most intricate ritual practices that are connected with divination. It is also a mnemonic device by which diviners, their devotees and their clientele are all reminded about things connected with divination. Thus speaking about the Australian aborigines, Durkheim thought

symbol was indeed a concrete "representation of an impersonal force, an essence or vital principle; a force which to us would be abstract but for the Australians, is concrete".<sup>45</sup> This is why it is not to be "viewed as a pre-scientific form of knowledge, but as reality in its own right".<sup>46</sup> Keesing therefore defines symbol as "a sign that is related to the thing it refers to in a conventional manner. A cultural symbol is an object or other sign that has a range of culturally salient meanings."<sup>47</sup> These points have already been harmonized in Chapter 7, when 'various ritual objects associated with divination in Epie-Atissa' were studied. It was indicated there that everything has meaning to certain individuals in Epie-Atissa and present symbolic elements because of the inherent social and psychological interpretations that prevail. This is because people's feelings are expressed at two levels, both objectively and subjectively. Obviously the culture could not have been better understood and appreciated without such a study. Now it is clear why cultic objects like the aganaga 'ladder' and its variation, ugbolo, 'staff', are significant and symbolic to people in Epie-Atissa. To them the aganaga indicates 'death', uwu, while the ugbolo indicates 'sickness', ikpomu or a 'crisis situation', ababaa. Similarly, the use of colours like the white chalk around the eyes and on the right hand, is symbolic of 'war', ikoni, and camwood dye is symbolic of a number of things, namely: ukali, 'power', utom-kpokpo, 'long life'; and imo, 'fecundity'.

Thus, symbol performs the functions of bringing alive some of the things which have to do with the culture, especially things that remind the community of their cosmology. It helps in the dramatic performance of the divinatory seance because people are more easily willing to identify with that which affects the culture, the goals of the individuals, and the social group. It is a means of gaining consensus, so that the barriers between client and diviner relationship are easily broken. Then by the application of the internal semantic approach, records could be maintained of a candidate with a call to divinership, how his call is confirmed, and how his initiation to office of diviner is patterned. This finally leads to the divinatory process, of the setting up of an oracle or 'shrine', ugula; how consultations are performed, and the various rituals associated with them. An analysis of these aspects may give an indication whether there is a common use of basic, elementary kinds of signification and "categories of symbolic patterning"<sup>48</sup> in transcultural divination. Divination is therefore basically concerned with the purpose of performing a duty and also to fulfil an assignment.

The final theoretical approach that has similarly affected this study is the prax~~o~~logical approach. According to Devisch, this is intended to combine into a whole related aspects in these different approaches so as to present the study of divination in "a pluri-ethnic context".<sup>49</sup> The study of divination could then be concluded to present a unified overview of the subject as "a social and cultural

practice".<sup>50</sup>

The social, cultural dimensions of divination in Epie-Atissa affects the way the aganaga, 'ladder' divinatory seance of Ishmael Binadomu was conducted at Akaba, on Tuesday, 25 July, 1985. It was conducted in public on a bright sunny day. Thus it served the dual purposes of both a divinatory seance as well as a great social event at which everybody in the neighbouring villages attended. It therefore became a rendezvous for relatives and friends, where acquaintances were renewed. In a society where certain recreational facilities peculiar to the western world, such as, cinemas, sports, operas, polo, etc. are lacking, public divinatory seances generate identical interests and opportunity for people to get away from the drudgery of farming, fishing and family boredom, to recreate themselves. Thus, divination could be considered as fulfilling a social function. Culturally, divination is a means by which consensus and social control are generated so that decisions taken are binding. Hence, according to Mendonsa, divination "enables persons to justify the outcome of any social situation; and a divinatory pronouncement can never be proved wrong".<sup>51</sup>

The pluri-ethnic dimension of divination, with particular reference to Nigeria, has also been discussed with reference to Ifa divination in Yoruba area; Afa divination in Ibo area; Epha divination in Urhibo area, and the various types of divination in Kalabari, Nembe, Brass, Ijo, Apoi and Epie-Atissa areas.

The other ethnic groups where especially post-mortem or corpse divination is practised are in parts of Ghana and the Southern Ivory Coast. In these places, the corpse is carried by two or four men, without the use of any frame. According to Debrunner, the corpse "was asked questions and answered 'yes' or 'no' by the way it made the carriers sway and knock forward. In this way, the corpse could knock against the guilty person. These ordeals are now all prohibited by law".<sup>52</sup> The reason for the prohibition was because the purpose was to ascertain who among the living bewitched and caused the death of the deceased. The person so identified was thus either killed by members of the community or else he killed himself. It was not intended to find out if someone died, practising witchcraft as is the case in Epie-Atissa. Even then, this depicts and illuminates the relevance of the pluri-ethnic context of divination.

But, apart from the aganaga type of post-mortem divination just discussed, the igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination practised by Better Wilson at Kpansia also has pluri-ethnic and transcultural dimensions. The connection here relates to the practice of 'tea leaf' and 'coffee grounds' divination, known as tasseomancy and tasseography,<sup>53</sup> which started during the Middle Ages in different parts of Europe, and have persisted to this day. The premise is the same. For example, in igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination, the priestess fills the little glass with kaikai, 'palm-gin',

and while possessed, looks into the glass for revelations for her client. The palm-gin in the glass serves as the screen through which revelations come (see at Chapter 3, pp.208-213). Similarly, in 'tea leaf' or 'coffee grounds' divination, special tea cups are filled, and following given directions, diviners are able to interpret the tea dregs, because "the stems and leaves form shapes that are called symbols".<sup>54</sup> Like the igilasi, 'drinking glass' divination, the 'tea leaf' divination is still practised at the present time in England, and in other parts of Europe. In both cases, the praxis, that is with reference to the art, meaning and purpose of divination, is still the same. People use them when faced with crisis situations. Thus, in the praxiological approach, the field is broadened from the micro to the macro levels in the study of divination. This brings fresh insights, and elucidates complexities.

### CONCLUSION

Finally, it is necessary to lay stress on a few vital points. First, the extent to which divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa are indigenous, and the extent to which they are influenced from outside. The most indigenous types of divination in Epie-Atissa are the aganaga, 'ladder', and ugbolo, 'staff' for which strict control is placed upon the type of materials used in constructing the frames and the methods of divination. Both are attached and actually restricted to communal 'shrines', ugula, because the aganaga



in particular is related to 'ancestral', inibudu matters, and therefore controlled by Utoken, 'the ancestral deity'. Decisions taken after aganaga divination cannot be revoked. Such decisions cannot be contested in the law courts because Utoken stands and symbolizes the entire community, including both the living and the dead. No-one ever takes the dead to a court of law. It is therefore the most important medium of solidarity and consensus in Epie-Atissa community.

However, it has already been indicated that the deity called Orisa at Akaba was brought to that community by a man called Chukunekwu, meaning 'God is Speaking', from Kwale, Bendel State, Nigeria, possibly in 1945, when the community was faced with serious crises (see above, Chapter 2, pp.136-140). The name, Orisa, corresponds with Olisa, the Ibo name for deity. But Orisa is more of Yoruba, which according to Bascom, has "often been translated as deity".<sup>55</sup> Besides this name, there is nothing else that relates Orisa at Akaba to Yoruba culture or tradition. Everything about it is Epie-Atissa; but there are moments when certain incantations are done in Ibo language, since Chukunekwu, the founder, spoke Ibo. But neither of the devotees nor the members of the cultic personnel have made any special effort to learn Ibo language as a result. They have no longer any links with Kwale, the birth place of the founder, since he must have been long dead. However, since almost all the members of the cultic personnel in this shrine were once members of the Anglican church, they are sometimes syncretic. For example, while divining and seeking for ways

to bring about the healing of Chief Macauley Saife who was critically ill in the hospital at Yenagoa, Orisa recommended that a certain number of candles be burnt around his bed in the hospital; a new Bible be opened for him in the burial ground, and his sins be confessed; and the 'white man's cross' be tied to the entrance to the door leading to his sitting room in order to ward off evil forces (see at Chapter 2, pp.115-120). Such syncretic aspects are definitely not permissible with regard to aganaga divination because it is a taboo. Things are done only in strict accordance with 'the laws of the land', igbese utoken, which happen to be the norm. Hence aganaga is the purest indigenous type of divination in Epie-Atissa.

Syncretic tendencies are also responsible for the assignment of a cultic secretary who is appointed at Akaba to keep records of the various clientele, the reasons for their visits with appropriate dates, money paid, and prescriptions at Orisa shrine. This may not only be a Christian derivation, but also an innovation similar to what is done in hospitals and dispensaries in parts of the Niger Delta and other parts of the world. Perhaps the intention is to elevate what happens in <sup>the</sup> Orisa shrine along similar levels to those in some of the government and academic institutions. Again, this cannot be allowed in other communal shrines which are completely dedicated to 'ancestral', inibudu matters. These things are based strictly on oral tradition, not on record keeping, which is a western influence.

A second aspect worth discussing is in connection with some of the basic differences between the two specific types of divination practised in Epie-Atissa, namely, the communal and individual types of divination. It has already been indicated that the communal type of divination is embodied in the aganaga, 'ladder', and the ugbolo, 'staff' divinatory instruments. Their use is restricted strictly to the communal 'shrines', ugula, such that their roles are also specified. The aganaga, 'ladder' is restricted to post-mortem divination only. It serves as a means by which members of the community communicate with their dead and the 'ancestors', inibudu. But this can only be done through the central shrine of Utoken, the ancestral deity, directed by the chief priest and his cultic personnel. Thus, aganaga is the most important and the most significant symbol of the community, as well as the means of communal solidarity and consensus.

The ugbolo, 'staff' is a variation of aganaga and it is used mainly and specifically for crisis related problems. But it must be operated as well from the central, communal shrine, and similarly supervised either by the chief priest of Utoken, or of related communal deities. In all such places, the chief priests and the cultic personnel are all male; female personnel are prohibited. Most people would visit such places, as indicated in the case of Orisa at Akaba, because of the feeling that they are more reliable than the privately operated ones.

The privately operated shrines are the individual shrines mostly manned by female mediums. They are not linked to the central shrines, so they are quite independent of their supervision. The priests and priestesses who own such individual shrines are accountable to their individual deities and to themselves. They establish their norms and values. In other words, they produce their own professional ethics, so that the prices for divination charged by these individual diviners may depend according to the status of the client. Thus, a rich man may be charged much higher than a poor man. Individual diviners may therefore be more inclined towards pecuniary and commercial gains.

Individual divinatory shrines differ in the quality of the treatment the people receive. For example, Prophet Orioko Dangolo, priest of Epie-Bottle divination, does not mind administering to his clients LSD.<sup>56</sup> Individual divinatory shrines are therefore possible sources of foreign influence into divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa. As a result, some endeavour to protect themselves by having a government licence, something which the communal diviners will not do. They are already recognized by being communal, so they are more careful and attach greater responsibility to their divinatory practices.

A third aspect of divinatory emphasis in Epie-Atissa is in connection with gender discrimination. Women are not allowed to be priestesses in communal shrines. It is particularly, an irrevocable taboo for women to participate

as bearers of the aganaga divinatory frame during post-mortem divinatory seances, or as bearers of the ugbolo divinatory frame, during crisis related divination. The bearing of these frames is restricted to men only. They may however practice privately, individually, as diviners.

The fourth is the shamanistic type of divination. As already mentioned, this is again restricted to the prayer houses and the Aladura and Garrick Braide types of churches, which also operate in many villages in Epie-Atissa. Some attend such churches in order to benefit from whatever prophetic revelations they might receive. Having received these, they return as quickly as possible to the divinatory shrines for confirmation and necessary treatment. For such people, the prayer houses, and spiritual churches perform identical functions with the diviners. Some think the divinatory centres are more powerful and more dependable. Those who are dissatisfied with the prophetic utterances may 'sue' them before the diviners, demanding that they be killed. They are therefore regarded as some of the malevolent forces in the area because they may prophesy lies, and thus cause more confusion. Nonetheless, there are others who believe in them and therefore go there during crisis moments, instead of going to the diviners.

It remains to be stressed that this is only an exploratory study concerning the practice of divination in Epie-Atissa. There are several other divinatory centres in the area that have not been explored. In other words, this work is far

from exhausting the subject. For example, all the various ritual objects associated with divination in Epie-Atissa have not been thoroughly investigated as yet. Only a few items have been presented here. Similarly, it is certain that several symbols associated with divinatory practices in Epie-Atissa have not even been treated. Therefore, the descriptive analysis of the various types of divination practised in Epie-Atissa still needs to be completed, along with the meanings, various functions, and the clientele, from one centre to the other. A more comprehensive work needs to be done, not only in Epie-Atissa area, but also in other neighbouring communities in the Niger Delta.

**CHAPTER 8****FOOTNOTES**

1. Evan M. Zuesse, 'Divination and Deity in African Religions', History of Religions (1975), 15, pp.158-182.
2. Renaat Devisch, Perspectives in Divination in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa', in Wim M.J. Van Binsbergen and Matthew Schoffeleers, Theoretical Explorations in African Religion (London: 1985), pp.50-78.
3. Zuesse, op. cit., p.160.
4. Devisch, op. cit., p.52.
5. cf. A. Retel-Laurentin, 'La Force de la Parole' in Vernant (1974), pp.295-319; Oracles et Ordales chez les Nzakara (Paris: Mouton, 1969).
6. For details, see George Dumézil, Archaic Roman Religion, trans. Philip Krapp (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2, pp.594-610; A. Fairbanks, Handbook of Greek Religion (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp.35, 234; Lucien Levy-Bruhl, Primitive Mentality, trans. Lilian A. Clare (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp.126-146.
7. cf. Koffi Appiah-Kubi, Man Cures, God Heals, Religion and Medical Practice Among the Akans of Ghana (Totowa, New Jersey: Allaheld, Osmun and Co. Publishers, Inc., 1981), pp.18-33, in which he discusses problems in connection with 'spirit possession in Traditional Healing', in relation to spirit possession in Ghana.
8. See I.M. Lewis, Religion in Context, Cults and Charisma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.23.
9. Omar Khayyam Moore, 'Divination - A New Perspective', American Anthropologist (1957), 59, pp.69-74.
10. This may correspond to 'tea leaf divination' practised in the Middle Ages in parts of Europe, and still practised up to the present time here in certain parts of London, notably Brixton. cf. Walter B. Gibson and Litzka R. Gibson, The Complete Illustrated Book of Divination and Prophecy (London: Souvenir Press Ltd., 1987); this divinatory practice is called tasseomancy or tasseography.
11. cf. Zuesse, op. cit., p.163.
12. Devisch, op. cit., p.53; E. Bourguignon, Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973).

13. Wande Abimbola, Ifa, An Expository Corpus (Ibadan: 1976), p.18.
14. Ibid., p.20.
15. E.M. McClelland, The Cult of Ifa Among the Yoruba (London: Ethnographics, 1982), p.88.
16. Wande Abimbola, op. cit. p.161.
17. cf. Zuesse, op. cit., p.161.
18. See Herbert William Parke, Oracles of Zeus (London: Basil Blackwell, 1968); also his work on The Delphic Oracle (London: Basil Blackwell, 1956), for details.
19. E. M. McClelland, op.cit, p.6.
20. See A.F.F. P. Newns, 'Epie-Atissa Group Intelligence Report', 1935; NA/E, Deg. Dist. 3/2/7; NA/I, CSO 26, 31291 (unpublished), p.3, in which mention is made of a Nembe settlement which existed then opposite Onopa, near Yenagoa, where Nembe traders lived. Also during this time, Toun, Brass, was the British Colonial and Judicial Headquarters to which tax payers in Epie-Atissa sent their taxes.
21. cf. Marius Nkwo, Igbo Cultural Heritage 1 (Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1984), p.16.
22. Robin Horton, 'Ikpataka Dogi, A Kalabari Funeral Rite', African Notes, 5, 3 (1970), p.57.
23. Devisch, op. cit., p.56.
24. cf. Marion Kilson, 'Ambivalence and Power: Mediums in Ga Traditional Religions', Journal of Religion in Africa (1971/72), 4, p.1171.
25. Those who hold this view include, M. Gluckman, Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society (Oxford: 1971), pp.229-235; and Victor Turner, Ndembu Divination, op. cit., pp. 235f.
26. It is the view of Turner, op. cit., p.124, that divination performs "a coercive function within the micro-politics of Ndembu society", because they lacked a central government. There may be a coercive function of divination in Epie-Atissa also. But since there is a strong government in the country, diviners may have to function according to law, hence the need for licensing their individual divinatory premises, as already discussed. Others who express similar views with Turner include: E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande, op. cit., pp.258-270. M. Jackson, 'An Approach to Kuranko Divination', Human Relations (London: 1978), 31, pp.117-138; R. Werbner, 'The Superabundance of Understanding: Kalanga Rhetoric and Domestic Divination', American Anthropologist (1973), 75, pp.1414-1440.



27. For ideas concerning obstetric function of divination, see J. Middleton, Lugbara Religion: Ritual and Authority Among An East African People (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp.129ff.
28. cf. J.W. Williams, 'Obstetrics', Medical Anthropology Quarterly: International Journal for the Cultural and Social Analysis of Health (1987), 1, 3, p.256.
29. Ibid., p.267; also see Judith Walzer Leavitt, Brought to Bed, Child Bearing in America, 1930-1950, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Robert A. Hahn, 'Division of Labor: Obstetrician, Woman and Society in Williams Obstetrics, 1903-1985', Medical Anthropology Quarterly, 1, 3 (1987), pp.256-282; J.W. Williams, 'Obstetrics', in A Textbook for the Use of Students and Practitioners (New York: Appleton, 1903).
30. Geoffrey Hurd, et. al., Human Societies, op. cit. p.27.
31. Roger M. Keesing, Cultural Anthropology, op. cit., p.330.
32. See E. Bourguignon (ed.), Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973), pp.30-33; P. Rigby, 'Prophets, Diviners and Prophetism: The Recent History of Kiganda Religion', Journal of Anthropological Research, (1975), 31 pp.116-148.
33. cf. William D.G. Hunter, 'Osum-Mystical Goddess of Yorubaland', in M. Azar and M.W. Fattal (eds.), Alminbar Tribune (Paris: Alminbar Sarl, Nov. 1946), p.17.
34. cf. A.F.F.P. Newns, 'Epie-Atissa Intelligence Report' (1935), op. cit. p.179.
35. cf. Haralambos, Sociology, Themes and Perspectives, op. cit., p.11.
36. Robin Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', Africa (1967), 37, pp.50-51; 155-187.
37. See Robin Horton, 'Ikpatata Dogi, A Kalabari Funeral Rite', op. cit., pp.57-71; G.O.M. Tasie, Kalabari Traditional Religion, op. cit., pp.21ff.
38. E.J. Alagoa, 'The Western Apoi', African Notes, op. cit., pp.15-17.
39. See Devisch, op. cit., pp.62-63, for similar views.
40. cf. George W. Stocking (ed.), History of Anthropology, 1, Observers Observed, Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p.74, in which it is reported that E.B. Tylor lamented in some of his notes about such possibilities.

41. Ibid., p.96; also see Bronislaw Malinowski, 'The Natives of Mailu: Preliminary Result of the Robert Mond Research work in New Guinea', Trans. Roy. Soc. So. Aust. (1915), 39, pp.49-706.
42. George W. Stocking, Observers Observed, op. cit., pp.96-97.
43. See Victor Turner, Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp.15-33; also E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande, pp.313-351, for similar views.
44. Robert Horton, 'African Traditional thought and Western Science', op. cit., p.155.
45. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, A History of Anthropological Thought (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p.154.
46. Devisch, op. cit., p.68.
47. Roger M. Keesing, Cultural Anthropolgy, A Contemporary Perspective (New York: CBS Publishing Asia Ltd., 1981), p.519.
48. cf. Devisch, op. cit., 75.
49. Devisch, op. cit., p.77.
50. Idem.
51. Eugene L. Mendonsa, The Politics of Divination, A Processual View of Reactions to Illness and Deviance among the Sisal of Northern Ghana (London: University of California Press Ltd., 1982), p.109.
52. H. Debrunner, Witchcraft in Ghana (London: Brown Knight and Truscott Ltd., 1959), p.102.
53. cf. Walter B. Gibson and Litzka R. Gibson, The Complete Illustrated Book of Divination and Prophecy, op. cit., pp.144-154.
54. Ibid., p.144.
55. William Bascom, Ifa Divination, op. cit., p.104.
56. For details, see Appendix I.

## APPENDIX I

### SUBSTANCE X

1. OBTAINED Care of Rev. S.A. Fefegha
2. ANALYSIS

#### (a) Infra-Red Spectrum

The Infra-Red Spectrometer has the ability to scan the substance X and produce a spectrum or picture. This was compared against the spectra of other known drug substances.

By this method the inference was made that the substance X under investigation gave a spectrum which resembles that of Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). This was done by comparing the various characteristic absorption peaks of the substance X with the peaks given by compound LSD. The conclusion was that the substance X is LSD.

#### (b) Solubility & Litmus Paper Test

The substance X was not quite soluble in water and gave no change of colour with litmus paper.

(c) The melting point of substance X was determined and found to be 200-204 deg.C which indicates that the substance X was probably in the form of the tartrate which is one of the forms of pharmaceutical presentation of LSD. LSD itself has m.p. of 80-85 deg.C.

### 3. Relevance of LSD

(a) Source: Derived from Ergot, Claviceps Purpurea, a fungus on rye and wheat.

#### (b) Psychological Response

LSD is a hallucinogenic drug producing marked aberrations of behaviour, which include:

Elevation of the blood pressure, dilation of the pupils, some facilitation of the spinal reflexes, and excitation of the sympathetic nervous system and the brain.

#### (c) Potency

A grown man requires only 0.1 milligram of LSD for full clinical response when the substance is ingested orally. LSD acts within 30-60 minutes and the effects usually last for 8-10 hours although occasionally some effects persist for several days. The drug is presumably lethal if taken in large enough quantities.

(d) The Experience

One most easily described experience by users is the effect of being "flooded" with visual experience, as much when the eyes are closed as when they are open. Light is greatly intensified, colours are vivid and seem to glow, images are numerous and persistent, yielding a wide range of illusions and hallucinations, details are sharp, perception of space is enhanced and music may evoke visual impressions, or light may give the impression of sounds. The sense of personal identity is altered, space may become boundless and the passage of time very slow. The person may believe that he is the universe.

Head, Department of Chemistry  
Rivers State University of  
Science and Technology  
Port Harcourt  
Nigeria

12th August, 1985

TABLE 1

MEN - THEIR OCCUPATIONS AND TYPE OF DIVINATORY ENQUIRY AT ORISA SHRINE, AKABA February 9 1983 - February 7 1986

S/N	PROBLEMS *	Farmer	Trader	Govt./Factory Worker	Teacher	Village Head	Landlord	Unemployed Applicant	Total Occurrences	Total amount Paid
1	Family protection	24	6	2	1	-	-	-	33	158.2
2	Kill my enemies	11	8	-	-	-	-	1	20	173.0
3	Sick, Need Healing	11	2	-	1	1	-	-	15	107.0
4	Need Promotion, Progress	3	1	3	-	-	-	-	7	14.0
5	Wife's Safe Delivery	4	1	2	-	-	-	-	7	64.0
6	No Peace in Family	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	5	14.0
7	Barren Wife Need Child	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	25.0
8	Recover Stolen Property	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	5	40.0
9	Success in Exams	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	5	-
10	Dreams - Interpretation	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	5	5.0
11	Help to Complete Building	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	4	-
12	Money Never Stays in Hand	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	-
13	Demand Debt from Debtor	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	40.0
14	Reverse Bad Luck	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	6.0
15	Need Gainful Employment	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	10.0
GRAND TOTAL									117	N 656.2

\*This data shows the number of times each problem listed occurred in the register as were mentioned by various men.

WOMEN - VARIOUS CATEGORIES WHO ENQUIRED AT ORISA SHRINE, AKABA, FOR DIVINATION FROM 9th February 1983 - 7th February 1986

475

S/N	PROBLEMS *	HOUSEWIFE	WIDOW	FARMER	TRADER	SINGLE	STUDENT	PRIESTESS	TOTAL OCCURRENCES	TOTAL AMOUNT
1	Sick, Need Healing	35	6	-	1	-	1	1	44	N 31.0
2	Protection, Prosperity	24	6	5	3	-	-	1	39	162.0
3	Kill My Enemies	23	3	-	2	-	-	-	28	82.0
4	Need A Child	14	2	-	4	1	-	-	21	46.0
5	Pregnant, Safe delivery	14	3	1	1	-	-	-	19	17.0
6	Dreams - Interpretation	14	1	-	-	-	1	-	16	6.0
7	Omens - Interpretation	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	12.0
8	Pass Exams	7	3	-	-	-	1	1	12	14.0
9	Harassed by Deity	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	1.2
10	Want Life-Partner	6	-	-	-	2	-	-	8	25.0
11	Need Employment	4	3	-	-	-	-	1	8	6.6
12	Confessions	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	1.2
13	Death of Children	5	-	-	1	-	-	-	6	6.0
14	Police Arrests; Court Cases	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	5	38.0
15	Building a house	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-
16	Live in Fear - No Peace	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
17	Victim of Evil Medicine	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	3	-
18	Want to Relocate	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	3	15.0
19	Child under a Curse	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
20	Query about Orisa's Work	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	8.0
21	Find Lost Property	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	6.0
22	Constant Quarrels	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
23	False Accusations	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
24	Demand Debt from Debtor	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	7.0
25	Sleeplessness	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
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GRAND TOTAL									264	N475.00
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\*Data showing the number of times each problem listed occurred.

TABLE 3

**SHOWS CATEGORIES OF MEN AND WOMEN, TOTAL NUMBERS AND AMOUNT PAID FOR DIVINATION**

**AT ORISA SHRINE, AKABA, FROM 9TH FEBRUARY, 1983 - 7TH FEBRUARY 1986.**

MEN								
Men	Farmer	Trader	Govt/Factory Worker	Teacher	Village Head	Landlord	Unemployed Applicant	Total No. Total Amount Pd.
Categories	49	15	7	2	1	1	1	76
Amount Pd	N421.20	N126.00	N49.00	N44.00	-	N6.00	N10.00	- N656.20

WOMEN									
Women	Housewife	Widow	Trader	Farmer	Priestess	Student	Single	Total No.	Total Amount Pd.
Categories	89	26	11	6	4	3	3	142	
Amount Pd	N358.60	N40.20	N51.00	N14.00	N10.00	N2.00	-		N475.80

Total No. of Men - 76; - Total amount paid - N656.20

Total no. of Women - 142; - Total amount paid - N475.80

Grand Total: 218 Persons N1,132.00

TABLE 4: STATISTICS SHOWING THE NAMES OF VARIOUS TOWNS AND VILLAGES 477  
FROM WHICH PEOPLE WENT TO ORISA SHRINE, AKABA, FOR  
DIVINATION FROM FEB. 9, 1983 - FEB. 7, 1986

(1983 FIGURES)

S/N	TOWN OR VILLAGE	POPULATION	CLAN	STATE	NO. AT ORISA
1	AKABA	909	ATISSA	RIVERS	21
2	ANGALABIRI	5586	SAGBAMA	RIVERS	1
3	AGBURA	1700	ATISSA	RIVERS	1
4	AGUDAMA	2841	EPIE	RIVERS	1
5	AMARATA	2300	EPIE	RIVERS	4
6	AZIKORO	2000	EPIE	RIVERS	4
7	BEBELBIRI	2198	ATISSA	RIVERS	10
8	BIOGBOLO	742	EPIE	RIVERS	2
9	EKEKI	1082	EPIE	RIVERS	3
10	ETEGWE	1673	EPIE	RIVERS	4
11	FAMGBE	2574	ATISSA	RIVERS	22
12	IGBOGENE	3068	EPIE	RIVERS	1
13	IHUOMA			(IBO)	1
14	IJEBU			(YORUBA)	2
15	IKOLO	2229	ATISSA	RIVERS	20
16	OBOGORO	887	ATISSA	RIVERS	14
17	OGOLOMU			RIVERS	1
18	OGU	1970	ATISSA	RIVERS	7
19	OKAKA	1032	EPIE	RIVERS	1
20	OKUTUKUTU	907	EPIE	RIVERS	4
21	ONOPA	922	ATISSA	RIVERS	17
22	OTUOKPOTI	4300	OGBIA	RIVERS	2
23	OVOM	1537	ATISSA	RIVERS	16
24	SABAGREA	5581	S.KOLOKUMA	RIVERS	1
25	SEIBIRI			RIVERS	1
26	SWALI	490	ATISSA	RIVERS	21
27	URHOB			(BENDEL STATE)	1
28	YENAGOA	2787	ATISSA	RIVERS	21
29	YENAKA	577	ATISSA	RIVERS	4
30	YENIZUE	2799	EPIE	RIVERS	4
31	UNKNOWN	-	-	-	6

TOTAL NO. OF PEOPLE

218



**TABLE 5: STATISTICS SHOWING NO. OF PEOPLE WHO WENT OF ORISA SHRINE, AKABA, FOR DIVINATION FROM THE RIVERS STATE, AND OTHERS FROM OTHER PARTS OF NIGERIA, FROM FEB. 9, 1983 - FEB. 7, 1986**

S/N	STATE	CLANS	NO.	NO. OF PERSONS
1	RIVERS (NIGER DELTA)	ATISSA	12	174
		EPIE	10	28
		KOLOKUMA	1	1
		OGBIA	1	2
		SAGBAMA	2	2
		OTHERS	2	2
		TOTAL NO.	27	208

**2. THOSE FROM OTHER PARTS OF NIGERIA**

NAME	NO. OF PEOPLE
BENDEL (URHOB0)	1
IBO	1
YORUBA	2
UNKNOWN	6
TOTAL NO.	10

3. TOTAL NO. OF VISITORS FROM THE RIVERS STATE	208
TOTAL NO. OF VISITORS FROM OTHER PARTS OF NIGERIA	10
GRAND TOTAL	218



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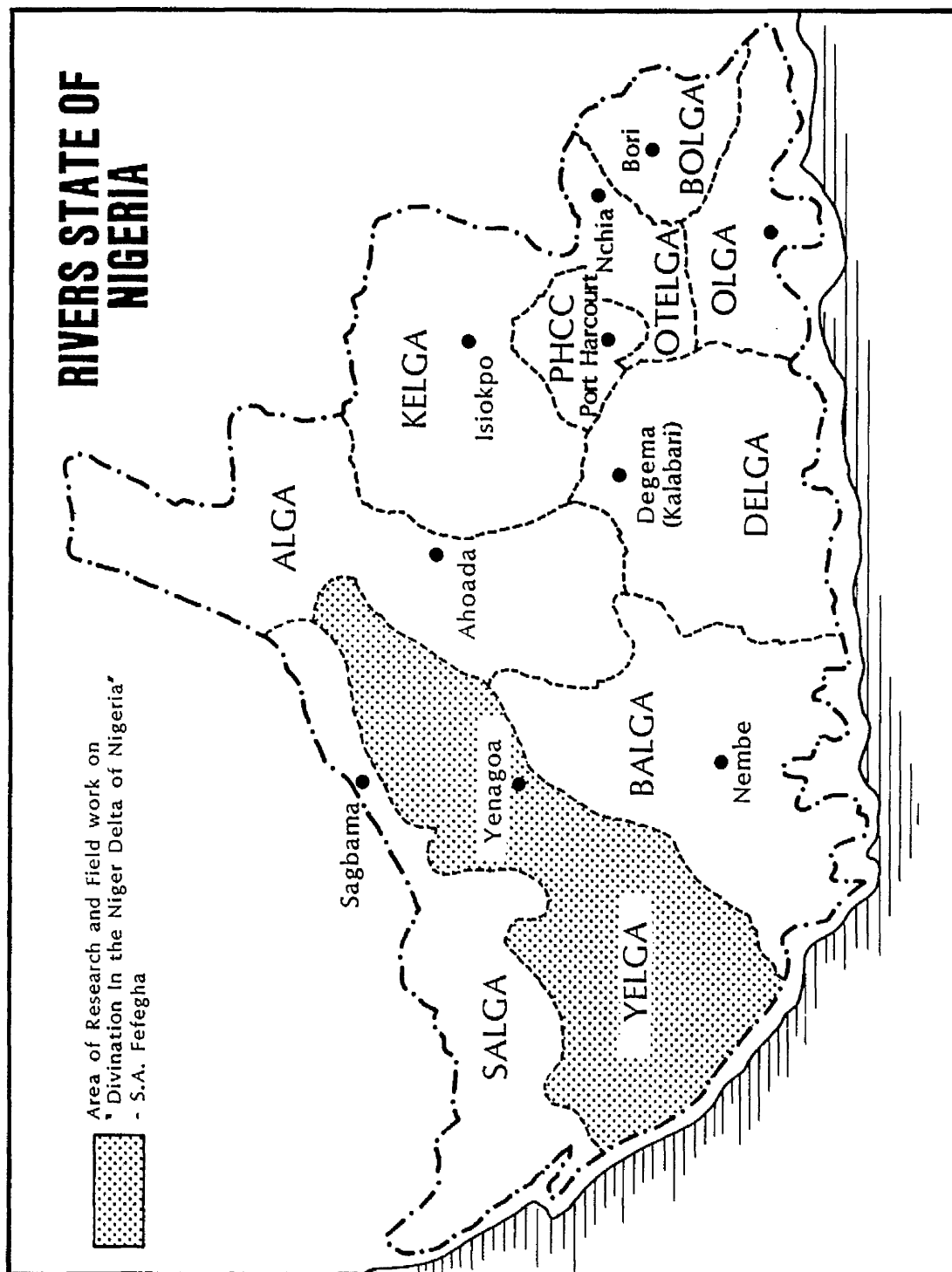
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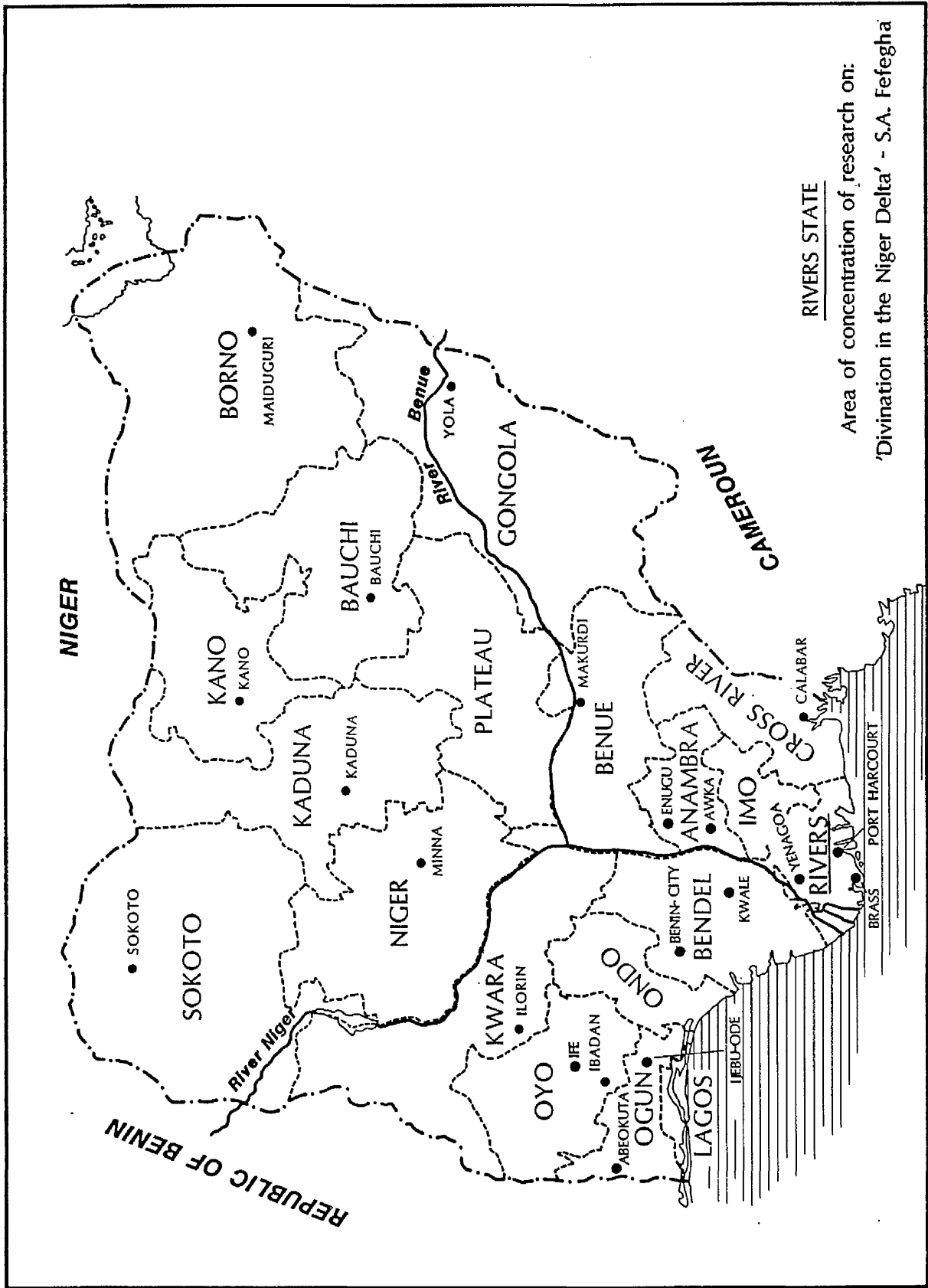
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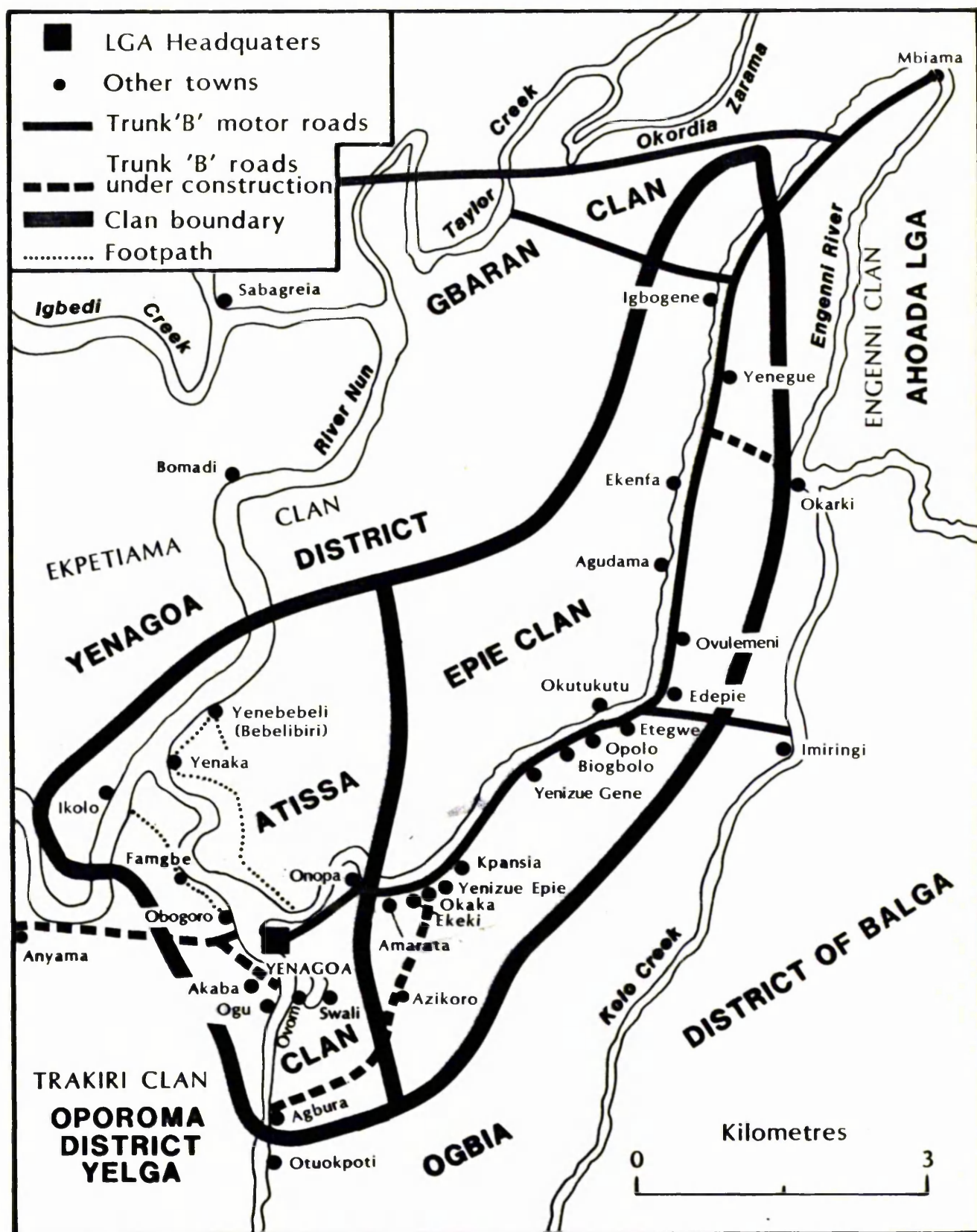




# NIGERIA - POLITICAL



# THE EPIE - ATISSA CLANS



Specific area of research and field work on -  
 'Divination in the Niger Delta of Nigeria' - S.A. FEFEGHA